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O'PARTLETTS

A TALE OF STRIFE AND COURAGE

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By JEAN EDGERTON HOVEY

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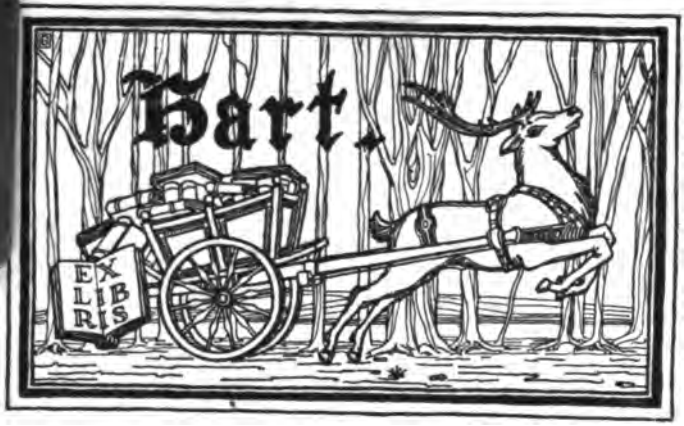

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JOHN O' PARTLETTS'

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"SHE LAY BREATHING IN HER FATHER'S ARMS."

(*See page* 293)

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JOHN O' PARTLETTS'

A TALE of STRIFE AND COURAGE

By

Jean Edgerton Hovey

Illustrated by

Edmund H. Garrett

Boston ::: L. C. Page &
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TO

J. K. E., Bettina, and Copeland

AN INITIAL AUDIENCE OF THREE IN THE GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL

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JOHN O' PARTLETTS'

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF JIM

He was not the "pertest" little nigger in the world, — if he had been it would have been better for him, for, in that case, no doubt he would have been a popular member of the community. That was what the community was looking for, a real jollification little nigger; one of the kind that can chuckle all the time, turn handsprings, make funny sayings, and between whiles turn off work as easily as the handsprings, — one of the kind that one sometimes reads about in books.

But Jim had never been of the "peart" order, not even at home on the old plantation, not even among the other little picka-

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ninnies, where there was liveliness and game-making a-plenty. He had always sat apart, always looked dreamy. But there no one noticed or paid any attention; he was one among scores of pickaninnies. Lost in the crowd his insignificant little person passed unremarked.

But here he stood alone, the only little black boy, far or near; people even came a distance to see him. He lived in an atmosphere of publicity and undue prominence which was strange to the last degree. Sometimes he was frightened, — he wanted to run and hide.

Anyhow, there was nothing in the world that he cared for now, since his Grandmammy died, but to go off by himself somewhere, fold his hands, and look up at the blue sky — when there *was* any blue in the sky — and dream. Look moony — as the neighbors called it.

And at such times he could see as plain as day, just on the outskirts of a great orange grove in Florida, a little cabin that he knew

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well. Looming in the distance he could see a big, big white house. Marse Desverney's house, where his Pa worked as butler, and the little Desverney children racing over the piazza in their white dresses, with gold chains around their necks; he knew they were "sp'ilt es pizen," for their old nurse used to say so when she came out for a chat at the quarters: "Bad an' sp'ilt es pizen; but pretty! — an' dat smart!" And he loved to watch them with their bright hair, their twinkling feet, and their wonderful, white faces with the merry, roguish eyes. *They* never called "nigger" at him; if they had called "nigger" at every pickaninny that passed by they would have done nothing but call "nigger" all day long. If he was noticed at all, it was usually by Miss Marietta, who would push her glowing, mischievous face — which was as bright-eyed as some bird's — between the railings, and call out in her merry, friendly voice: "Hello, little Jim, is that you?"

And he could see, too, the great orange

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grove — Marse Desverney's great grove — all shining and glittering; that was before the big "friz" came, and every tree stood up round and grand against the blue, blue sky; and he could see the small, waxy blossoms, and the fat, round buds; he could smell them! And he could see the ripening fruit, great balls of green, streaked and mottled with brightest yellow, hanging in heavy clusters on the slow-waving, perfumed boughs. And he seemed to hear the darkeys as they "hand packed de oranges," ranged up along the fence railings, dropping the big fruit softly into the clean crates, swaying slightly with the motion and singing, — now those on that side of the big gate:

"Tall es a lily, an' es white es milk —
Who dat a-callin'?
Fair es de cotton-weed, an' sof' es silk,
Who dat a-callin' me?"

And those on the other side of the big gate, taking up the melody in deep, melodious voices:

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"Who dat a-callin'?
Who dat a-callin'?
Who dat a-callin' me?
Ol' Mis' a-callin'!
Ol' Mis' a-callin'!
Over 'cross Jordan, callin' me!"

Then the soft, regular drop, drop of the fruit, the deep, hearty guffaws, the barking of dogs round the cabin doors, the clear voices of the white children up at the big house, the shrill, half wild calls of the pickaninnies as they rushed to and fro, — and, over all, the blue, blue sky, and the smell of the orange blossoms, so sweet, so strong, that it seemed to go through, through, to the very heart!

Then — some sudden noise, and his vision was gone! And when he turned his eyes to the bleak, bare road and fields about him, and to the little huddle of small, grey houses which crouched at the foot of the hill and constituted the town of Partlettsville, there was no light of enthusiasm in them; indeed, there was a look of isolation and weari-

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ness, yes, and even of downright unhappiness!

And this was what Partlettsville had against Jim. He was unhappy. And what right had any one to be unhappy, to look downhearted and lonesome in such a community? A perfectly self-respecting, early-to-bed and early-to-rise, capable, punctual, walk-along-the-narrow-road community! It would have been outrageous and impertinent for anyone to set himself up so; but when it came to a nigger! Partlettsville felt, but did not openly express its indignation. Kitty Merryweather, however, freely gave tongue.

"There's nothin' to them black people at bottom, but badness and sneakiness! The old woman was the only one I ever see that I could tolerate. They're thieves an' liars, the pack o' them!"

Kitty might have added that the only black people she had ever seen in her life were Jim and his Grandmammy. She and the old woman had been on amicable terms up to the time of the latter's death. This

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had occurred five months before; just as a late, dragging Spring came to the cold little town the old darkey passed away. She had lived and worked here during the long Winter, but she was not to see the fruit orchards in bloom, of which she had heard much.

She and Jim had come the Fall before, strangers to a strange place, quite by accident, and after the following manner:

After the "great friz" came to Marse Desverney's orchard, things did not go on so easily; more than two-thirds of the finest trees died; since the war money was not a-plenty with Marse Desverney, and he could not replant rapidly. Thus many hands that had been very busy were idle, and then, of course, as night follows day, money became scarce. To crown all the woes of that winter, "Ol' yaller Jim," little Jim's father, Marse Desverney's butler, took sick, "wid de extremity ob de cold," and died. Then it was that Jim's old Grandmammy, who had always been of a restless and independent nature, and who had always a deep wish

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within her to see de worl', was enticed by what she heard of the fine sights and grand ways in other parts of the country, — for, the war lately over, strangers had already begun to come into Florida, and before any one realized what she was about, almost before she knew it herself, she had gathered the belongings of herself and little grandson and was travelling North.

Useless to tell how she journeyed. Chance directed her, and, before long, she came to one of the great Northern cities, — the very greatest, I believe, — and there went into service. But not for nothing had she been bred in the country, and soon a longing for the green things came over her. She "hired out" to service in the suburbs. But here, somehow, whether it was true or not, she took up the idea that those about her "hadn't no fancy fo' seein' Jim around." All the little boy knew was, that one day she said to him: "Come 'long, honey, we'se gwine light out from here." And so they did.

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This happened in September, when the beautiful drowsy, hazy Indian summer that comes to the North lay over the land. It was warm, the golden-rod was in bloom, the old woman had some money in her bag, — her wages, "an' good wages fo' true!" And she was happy. They drifted along to the tune of: "Now we come dis fur, honey, an' seein' how things goes, I guess we'll work back South."

The towns were close together. They would walk from one town to the next. People were kind, sometimes food and lodging were given, sometimes the old woman worked in payment. And many a lift they received along the high road.

"Which direction are you going in?" some kind-hearted driver would ask them. "Are you going to Abbottsville, or to St. John's?"

"Oh, we'se jes' gwine 'long," the old darkey would reply unconcernedly. As a matter of fact, how should she know one town from another? She did not know which

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direction was north and which south; doubtless she could scarcely have told which state in the Union she was in. Space meant nothing to her, — she had no comprehension of distances. She had a vague idea that they'd "git South before the hard fros' ketch 'em." And that was about all.

And thus it happened that they drifted into Partlettsville toward the middle of October. And here they stayed, because here "de hard fros' ketch 'em."

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CHAPTER II

PARTLETTSVILLE

As Jim's Grandmammy remarked: "Et seem like de hard fros' ketch yo' mighty quick in dis 'ere part ob de worl'." She saw the necessity of abiding, and settled down with what grace she could, to winter it in Partlettsville.

Partlettsville, constricted, small and poor, like a narrow soul in a lean body, had looked out from its refuge under the hill for years and seen the rest of the world go forward. The railroad went to other towns, never to Partlettsville. Other towns grew, new industries came to them, new houses were built, new faces seen; but in Partlettsville, always the same faces, the same houses, the same ways. Other towns jeered at it, they called it "the last place," the "jumping off place." Partlettsville knew this well, and it

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was very, very sore. Thus it happened that it did not turn a cheerful face to the rest of the world. But it made up for the poor opinion of others by assuming a very self-satisfied and complacent expression of its own.

It was rather a mixed-up community anyhow. It seemed that several of the nations of the earth had sent a representative to this out-of-the-way little place, — and, let it be confessed in a whisper, not of their best.

There was the French shoemaker, sly and greedy. There was Kitty Merryweather, a cockney, born and bred, with a long tongue and a heavy hand, when she had the chance to use it, as little Jim had lately come to know. There were the Dutch butcher and his son, marvellously tricky and clever at under-weighing. There was Louisa Myers, the German proprietress of the thread and needle store, with her florid face, the picture of affability, but with the temper to be reckoned with. And there was Mr. Carruthers, the parson, a tall, lean Scotchman, with black beard, and intense smouldering eyes, who

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drove and threatened his flock, preached much about hell and damnation, and seemed to take little account of heaven.

It does not belong to this story to surmise how they all came here. Let it be supposed they drifted here as did little Jim and his Grandmammy. And there were others, the established natives of the place, whose forefathers had been the founders of Partlettsville. They had built it, these forefathers, on the stoniest, barest bit of land in all the country round, exposed to the bitter north winds, built on the wrong side of the hill, the great hill of Partletts', which seemed to absorb all the sunlight and cast its shadow over the little town. It stood out rocky, unbeautiful, uncompromising, its roads lined by a row of willow trees, whipped and topped, and bent down like old men. And, if there is any truth in the belief that surroundings have aught to do with the growing and expanding of souls, then the very look of their town might surely form some excuse for the inhabitants of Partlettsville if any among

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them lacked somewhat of a sense of beauty, and of sympathy, and of a striving for things beyond, inspired and higher.

It did not take little Jim's acute old Grandmammy long to perceive that the people about her were not "ob de cheerfules' or ob de mos' obligin' character." However, she was a cheerful soul herself, this old plantation darkey, and, like many of her kind, had the great gift of philosophically taking the world as she found it.

It came about that she and Jim settled down in an empty room in a cottage occupied by Kitty Merryweather and her two children. She found work by the day, and paid her rent.

Darkeys have a marvellous faculty for getting the things that they want around them. It is true that they want few things, and know well what those things are. It was not long before the funniest looking little second-hand cook stove was set up and merrily burning, red hot, night and day; a tin can graced

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with a small sprig of mint, and a crooked geranium, appeared in the window; a red cotton cloth decorated the rickety table; and two very sky-blue vases, filled tight with bunches of cat-tails, stood on the mantel. The old boards of the floor, after a few scrubbings, came out white, and a piece of bright red carpet was laid over them. There was a bench to sit on, and a mattress to spread down at night, with a yellow comforter; and a glass lamp, with a grand scarlet paper shade. The cooking utensils hung upon the wall against a piece of bright tin; and on a shelf stood a wooden water bucket, and a gourd.

Just how these things were got together, with almost magic speed, could hardly be told. They were collected by a sure hand, the hand of one who knew perfectly and instinctively what, in her eyes at least, was pertaining to the beauty and comfort of home.

And so this little room was home. Once shut out the world directly outside, and it

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would have passed for a room in almost any plantation cabin hundreds of miles away in the South.

Kitty Merryweather had no fancy for any one who "came in on her ground," as she expressed it; she went out and worked by the day, this business was her ground, and for years she had it to herself. There were those who went into regular service, sleeping and eating at their employer's, but to go around to the various farmhouses and do a great day's work of washing, ironing, and perhaps house-cleaning thrown in, was Kitty's particular vocation; and she loved it, she loved the gossip and the change of scene, and she justly prided herself upon the immense amount she could accomplish in a day. "More a sight than them lazy gals h'out in regular service can turn off in a week!" And she was in great demand, and was well paid.

Now, Jim's Grandmammy came in on this very ground, and it was expected accordingly that Kitty would abuse her up hill and down

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dale. But quite the contrary — she lived in Kitty's house, and on amicable relations.

"She's just an old toddlin' thing," Kitty said of her patronizingly to Louisa Myers, when she ran into the latter's store to buy some stockings for her Willie and Maggie. "You know 'ow it is with me, Mrs. Myers, no pickin' and choosin', but just goin' everywheres, far and near, — out to Furness' farm, three miles away, h'an' h'up to Partletts' to work for ol' Witch Beevish! An' who but me'd go that far, for a day's work? Let alone of bein' h'afraid of the Witch 'erself! An' a proper, rare one she is, too!" Kitty stopped to cackle her shrill laugh, her eyes growing brighter, as they always did when her tongue began wagging. "I've some bits to tell you, Mrs. Myers, I 'ave, when I chanct to get the time! But now I've got to 'ave two pairs of stockin's for Willie, an' one pair for Maggie! — Oh, it's 'eart breakin' the way them children keeps me goin'! Not as it's their fault, the best children the sun ever shone on, Willie in partic-

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ular. 'E sits up at night, readin' 'is catechism, Mrs. Myers, so's to 'ave it letter perfect against Sunday; it's touchin' your 'eart to see 'im! — But the holes in the stockin's, an' me no time to mend 'em, save at night when I'm so tired my bones is crackin'; an' kerosene so expensive to keep a light burnin' late! I borrowed a pint of oil only last night from the old nigger h'upstairs. Strange 'ousin' with niggers, eh, ain't it? But it's no pick an' choose with two children to keep, an' potatoes so dear, an' my Willie so fond of butter that he won't eat nothin' without butter spread a h'inch thick! Only last night 'e stole 'arf a pound o' butter out of my own safe an' put it away on the h'inside of 'im before you could wink your eyes; — an' me an' Maggie without a scrap to put on our bread! She set up 'er squallin' but I tol' 'er to shut 'er mouth, for boys comes first, and before gals, in my country anyhow! But, as I was sayin', the old nigger upstairs, she's old and toddlin' and can't go far to work, an' it's a fiddlin' day's work she does

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at best. An' she's a real obligin' one. Comes down pat with the rent every Saturday night. That's more than you can say for some white folks, ain't it? Well — it's not long those niggers 'd stay 'longsides o' me, if she didn't!" And Kitty again stopped long enough to emit her cackle. "An' polite! Say, but those Southern people trained the niggers grand! It's a bow, an' a duck, an' a 'Howdy, Missis!' every time she meets me in the hall! An' then, never meddlin' your things, an' ready an' willin' to hand out 'er own, just to oblige you in a tight place! An', of course, it's a little lift, yo' know, the rent comin' in on a Saturday night! An' the little room was just standin' there empty, you know, doin' nothin'! But then with children to bring up there's no pickin' an' choosin' — an' people should bear that in mind!"

Yes, it was that bow, and duck, and "Howdy, Missis!" that had partly melted Kitty's heart, — not made of remarkably penetrable stuff; and the obliging free-

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handedness in a community where, Heaven knows, free-handedness was not common, had completed the process. Kitty was one who loved beyond anything to get something for nothing. A few potatoes given to her were sweeter than any she could buy. Once, it is related, she took a sick chicken that a farmer gave her, in jest telling her it would make a fine stew; prepared it, ate it, and all the family were made most ill, but she afterwards remarked: "No matter, it tasted good; an' it cost us nothin'!" She was one who found it blessed to receive.

In the early morning she often went up to the old darkey's door and asked the "loan" of a bit of bread and a pinch of tea, receiving these in generous portion, with a bit of bacon thrown in; "Cause de chillun mus' have a lettle grease, jes' fur to make de breakfas' go down smoof," the old woman would say, and, with true darkey prodigality, she thought so little of these things that she gave herself no concern as to their return. In truth they were a gift, not a loan; and to

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Kitty Merryweather such meals tasted sweet indeed!

There were others in Partlettsville who found the old woman of an obliging sort, — in fact she was most polite, most obliging to all. This was partly due to genuine good nature, partly to natural shrewdness, for the old darkey had a store of wisdom of her own.

None but little Jim realized how little she found Partlettsville to her taste. He knew it well by the constantly iterated wish for Spring and open roads.

"Soon as de mil' wedder come, honey," she would say in a whisper, rolling her eyes at the closed door, "we'll get out from here, jes' es quick es we kin! An' we'll take de fus' road to de Souf!"

But when the mild weather at last came to Partlettsville the old woman had already taken a different road, and gone a longer journey.

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CHAPTER III

SOME MORE ABOUT JIM

After Jim's Grandmammy died, and he was left absolutely alone in the world, it was some time before he could, even approximately, realize the breadth and depth of the trouble which had befallen him.

After they took her away and buried her, he remained here in the little room where she had kept him and cared for him, lost in a kind of dumb wonderment. She, the faithful, was indeed gone! It seemed impossible, and occasionally he would say out loud in his slow, deep voice: "Gamma, wher' es yo'?" But no answer came.

Now, Jim was eleven years old, but no one would have thought it. He was a very little darkey, "wizened," and dumb, and slow, and very sad looking; his eyes had exactly the expression which one sometimes sees in

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a little dog's when it sits off and gazes at what is going on about it as if it does not exactly understand.

"What's ailin' 'im? Can't he take it in that his Grandma's dead?" Kitty asked her Willie, but Willie shrugged his shoulders.

"He's jus' sittin' up there starin'," he said. "Mayhap he's waitin' for to see her ghost!" he added with a snicker.

At first there was much talk of sending Jim to an orphan asylum, but that was far away. Then there was talk of writing down South, but Jim couldn't rightly remember Marse Desverney's address. And gradually the thing drifted over. It came about that, as he was there in her house, and she had children of her own to bring up, he fell into the charge of Kitty Merryweather. Mr. Carruthers would have an overseeing eye, and make sure that he was supplied with clothes; and Kitty declared that the child could do a scrap of work now and then for the bit he would eat.

"An' she'll be gittin' the worth of his

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food out of him!" was the general opinion.

Kitty was hopeful on this point, too. But alas for best laid schemes! Little Jim proved to be no worker. In the old days, on the old plantation, he had always been a puny mite, and, save to run on errands, naught had been expected of him. Now, in the midst of his tribulation, he seemed not so much unwilling to work as unable to keep his mind upon it.

"'E's been sp'ilt!" Kitty began explaining around. "I never see such a one! 'E's no idea of doin' as he's told, an' 'e can't remember nothin'!"

"An' that's a great way for her to be talkin'!" commented Louisa Myers in her bland voice, with a winking of her big eyes, "when everybody knows there's not a creetur she'd give *this* much to, without gettin' a very proper equivalent! Not," she added, "that I'm sayin' anything." For, like every one else, she had a dread of Kitty's tongue.

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But Kitty heard, and very soon she was in Louisa's store. She bought a paper of needles, and on her way out paused as if just remembering:

"Oh, by the by, Mis' Myers, I chance' to hear you think that little black one I've got quartered at my 'ouse is earnin' his wittles; if you want to feed him for a day or two, and 'ave his services for your pains, you're welcome, so far as I'm concerned!"

Louisa Myers was astonished, and a bit taken aback.

"Well," she said, in her slow way, coloring a little, "it's true I've got a bit of gardening to do, the Spring coming on so fast."

"I'll send him over to-morrow mornin'," spoke up Kitty, as prompt as you please, "an' you'd best 'ouse him for a few days, an' git your job done!"

That night she had the great joke to tell Maggie and Willie.

"An' she'll find him out! She'll find him out!" she crowed. "Oh, the grand treasure, let her 'ave him!"

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The next morning, accordingly, little Jim appeared at Louisa's.

The " bit of gardening " proved to be the rather tough job of dislodging some big stones along the fence line and setting them at regular intervals in a newly made garden bed, — a good bit of work for a grown-up.

Little Jim came to this task with his very slight supply of strength, his usual absent-mindedness, and a great deal of scariness; when it is added that he had for his breakfast a small piece of hard bread and a cup of stale tea, it will hardly be wondered at if the work did not proceed famously.

Louisa told him with patronizing blandness that she would leave him alone with it and not come back until twelve o'clock, for she hoped to be surprised at how much he would accomplish.

Little Jim, left alone in a dark shadowy corner of the garden, clawed and scratched away at the stones as effectively as he might. They were round, covered with mould and damp, and when he did get one up it would

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slip out of his hands and fall on his toes; and then, when he picked it up again, and hugging it to him, endeavored to walk, it slipped, slipped, slowly, surely, and finally struck the ground and bounded away. This happened thrice. The third time a sly, low laugh sounded from the hedge just at his elbow; he turned, and saw a person he knew well.

Willie Merryweather stood there, his hands on his hips, his cap pushed well back on his shock of red hair, nodding his head, and speaking encouragingly: "Try it again! Try it again!"

Jim, perforce, tried again. But if he was unable to do well when he believed himself to be alone, he did far worse before this self-invited audience. His hands began to tremble, his eyes rolled helplessly, and his lips quivered too.

"Fine, Mr. Nigger, fine! Pick it up with your ears! Carry it on the tip of your toes! What yo' tryin' to do? Play nine-pins?"

Jim grabbed a stone and staggered away

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with it in desperation, to be away from the taunting voice. He got it at length to the other end of the garden, rolled it into place, and stood looking at it a long while, in the hope that Willie Merryweather might go away. Unfortunately, just at this time, Louisa Myers, looking from an upper window, saw him.

"Well! if he ain't jes' starin'! Moonin', most likely!" And she watched him while five, ten, fifteen precious minutes went by.

When Jim finally returned to his corner, Willie Merryweather had disappeared. Greatly relieved, he again began his struggles with the big, slippery stones. Selecting one, he went round and round it, to loosen it from its bed. Suddenly he stopped and clapped his hand to his head. Something small, sharp and stinging had struck him! He looked all about. No one was in sight, but he had scarcely bent to his task again before he felt the same sharp sting, this time on his neck.

"Now — who dar!" he cried out in his

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deep little voice; and, straightening himself, rolled his eyes round in genuine affright. Then, lifting his head to look aloft, he suddenly received a shower of sharp little missiles thrown straight in his face, and: "Hi, dar!" came Willie Merryweather's voice, in mocking mimicry, from the branches of the big tree above.

The little darkey drew back.

"Oh, Marse Willie! Marse Willie!" he whimpered, covering his face with his claw-like, dirty hands.

"Oh, Marse Willie! Marse Willie!" mimicked the voice in the tree-top.

"Don' do me so, Marse Willie!"

"Don' do me so, Marse Willie!" mimicked the voice.

"I got to do my work, Marse Willie!" pleaded the small voice on the ground.

"I got to do my work!" came the taunting voice from the tree-top.

This was an enemy impervious to pleas! Jim stood for some time hesitating between fear of him and fear of displeasing the big,

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stranger woman, who had set him at this task. Finally he ventured from the shelter of the hedge, and again began his operations. Willie encouraged by voice and stone throwing, and Jim watched him, and moved cautiously, lest, in an unguarded movement, he should leap down upon his back.

When the morning was well spent, Willie scrambled down from his perch. He grinned around him affably, stood about for a few minutes, shying stones at an old fence post, just to prove his dexterity and fondness for this pastime, then sauntered off, hands in pockets, and an expression on his pale and freckled countenance that seemed to denote to the world a pleasing and comfortable self-satisfaction.

Yes, Willie had found an occupation entirely to his taste; that of teasing Mr. Nigger. It was amusing, easy, and beyond all — safe! His adversary — or rather, victim — was too undersized to dream of striking back, and, moreover, he never told tales. For Jim had not only been taught from birth,

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but he had something within him which instinctively comprehended the truth of the darkey saying: — "There ain't no luck in tellin' on white chillun, nohow!"

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CHAPTER IV

"GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME —"

WHEN Louisa Myers comprehended that during the whole course of the morning Jim had moved exactly three stones and set them in place, she was "dumb-foundered." No other word could express her feelings; — she stood "dumb-foundered."

She swallowed a few times and asked:

"What you been doing?"

"I dun tote t'ree stones, Missis," replied Jim. He did not look at her, because he was afraid of her big, blue eyes. He looked at the result of his labors, and felt very forlorn.

"Three stones!" repeated Louisa. But she took him into the house and gave him dinner consisting of cold potatoes and a dish of sauer-kraut. Priding herself upon acting almost too generously toward a worker who

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had accomplished so very little, Louisa would have been amazed indeed could she have suspected how extremely unpalatable this food appeared to the child.

Darkeys are something like cats; they will not eat simply for sustenance, if they cannot get what they like they prefer to eat nothing at all. And they like what they have been accustomed to.

Born and bred in a land flowing with fried chicken, fresh fish, sweet yams, corn pone, and oranges, Jim found nothing eatable in the heavy, tasteless "duff" with which Kitty Merryweather "filled up" her Willie and Maggie. Sickly from birth, he had always eaten little even when food to his taste was provided; and now, since his Grandmammy's death, he had come to have a kind of dread of the "strange food" which was given him. Louisa's sauer-kraut wore an unfamiliar appearance. He took a hasty taste, and frankly left it alone.

Louisa had certainly begrudged him the delicacy when she set it before him, but that

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did not prevent her from being exceedingly annoyed to see him leave it.

"What's the matter?" she asked sharply. "Ain't it to your taste?"

"I ain't hungry," said little Jim, and told the exact truth; for seated here in Louisa's small kitchen, under her big, compelling, observant eyes, he felt too lonely, frightened and forlorn to be hungry.

"Well, I guess there's a reason for that!" said Louisa, sharply, taking the plate away. "People that do their work is usually able to eat their victuals!"

For the afternoon she gave him the lighter task of pulling weeds out of her vegetable beds.

It was warm over in the vegetable garden. The air smelt of Spring, and the sky was blue. Some rabbits had a burrow under an old shed near by. They began coming out, now an old grey bunny, now a small, white one, then another grey, until a whole family were hobbling about, sitting up to cock their ears and listen, and rubbing their heads

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against the clumps of coarse grass, fast turning a vivid green.

Jim sat back on his heels, motionless. All cottontails are alike. He had seen the brother of that big bunny far down South. The sight was like a sight of home, and Jim began to see one of his visions; he began to see the orange grove, and the big, white house; he began to hear the darkeys singing:

"Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin' me!"

Then everything faded. He saw his Grandmammy in the little cabin kitchen, making meat soup, thickened with okra, flavored with fresh, green peppers, such as darkeys love. She was laughing, and wiping her hands on her apron, her broad face shining, her big, brass ear-rings twinkling. Then everything was still in the vegetable garden, save for the soft rustle of the rabbits warily hopping about in the grass. Jim's waking vision had passed into a dream.

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It was late in the afternoon when Louisa Myers broke the stillness; in a voice muffled by inward agitation she exclaimed:

"Well, what *is* the meaning of it!"

She was looking down on Jim's face upturned in the sunlight, peaceful, serene — And it was just this expression of serenity which was more than mortal flesh could endure! Louisa had a temper which, not only did others fear, she feared it herself. That was why, when she shook Jim's arm, she said to him with emphatic earnestness:

"Now, look here, don't you make me *mad,* — don't you make me *mad,* I warn you!"

And Jim, looking into her broad, accusing face, the flesh of which slightly quivered with the effort at self-control, had no wish to. He scrambled to his feet, but, as usual, he had not a word to say, and stood, slightly shuffling in the dirt, the picture of convicted guilt.

"Come along with me!" she said sternly, and Jim, with head lowered, followed.

By the kitchen steps stood a basket of freshly washed clothes.

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"Here, go into the kitchen and wash your hands, and then hang these things out on the line. Let me see if there's *something* you can do!"

Louisa helped him carry the basket to an open space, between a lilac hedge that bordered on the road and her cottage; then she left him, too wroth to look or speak further, and Jim began to take the things from the basket; they were small pieces, towels, etc., —a job quite within his powers, and this time he did not pause until it was complete.

"Have you done?" asked Louisa, slightly relenting from her extreme sternness when he came into the kitchen sooner than she expected.

"Yes, Missis!" said Jim, and he carefully set down the empty basket.

The soft Spring gloaming was falling outside; through the open door a glimpse of dark violet sky could be seen, in which, here and there, an illusive star twinkled. The air smelt sweetly of damp earth and budding verdure.

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Louisa walked slowly the length of the kitchen, reached the window, looked through it, and then she screamed; she screamed twice, and stamped her foot on the floor.

"You little scamp!" she cried out, "you careless, dirty, idle, little scamp!"

At the same instant there came a drumming on the front door of the house.

"Mis' Myers!" called Willie Merryweather's voice, "your clothes line is all tumbled down, an' the clothes in the dirt! I thought I'd tell yo', 'cause the dogs'll be tromplin' 'em!"

"As if I can't see with my own eyes!" yelled Louisa. And, rushing upon Jim, she seized him as he stood, with his back to her, and taking him by the shoulders, shook him until his teeth rattled. Then she marched him across the room, still holding him by the shoulders and shaking:

"Now, you dirty, low, careless little sloven! Get out of my house — I'll have you no more around! You nigger, you! You nigger, you!"

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And at each epithet she planted her knee vigorously in Jim's hinder parts.

Jim, utterly bewildered, cried out:

"Please, m'am, I ain't done nothin'! Please, m'am!"

The performance did not cause any great physical pain to little Jim, but it did cause him the most acute, mental anguish and terror. For Louisa's temper was unbound, and her face expressed a fury hardly to be put into words. She pushed Jim out of the house, slammed, locked and bolted the door, as if he were a ruffian who would rush back upon her.

When she had tranquillized herself sufficiently to take practical action, she grasped her basket and rushed out to the clothes line. There lay her day's wash in the soft, damp dirt. It was an embittering sight! She stooped to pick up the end of the line, which had been attached to a pole near the lilac hedge, and suddenly straightened herself. The end of the line was not broken; it had been cut, cleanly cut with a knife!

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Louisa began to run up and down her little yard, she began to put her hands to her head like one possessed.

"Oh!" she cried brokenly. "So that's the kind you are! Ach! Gott in Himmel! Ach, Gott! Not an accident, but spite, pure spite! An' I did nothin' to him, only give him his victuals, an' treated him decently! Oh, mein Gott! And his heart is like his body, black! Ach, my clothes line, cut down mit ein knife! My clothes in der dirt! Oh, der wickedness! der black-heartedness!"

Word going round that "Mis' Myers was in one of her tantrums," soon an audience was peeping through the lilac hedge. But Louisa was blind and deaf. She continued to run up and down her little yard, her large face white, and she talked to herself in the broken German-English which she always fell into when excited.

Occasionally she would run to the gate, throw it open, and shake a threatening fist down the road:

"Ach! If I had you now! If I had you

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now!" It was fortunate, indeed, for little Jim that she did not have him.

Altogether, though that was a memorable day for Louisa Myers, it was a still more memorable one for little Jim, because on that day a bad reputation was founded for him, and we all know that is no light encumbrance.

It was said that when Kitty Merryweather heard all about it she simply sat down and laughed until the tears ran down her face. Whether her Willie informed her of his share in it is not known; if he did she certainly would not have chided him severely for such an excellent joke.

"Well!" she remarked, "as long as he's had such a fine success with Mis' Myers, I'll be sendin' him round the neighborhood an' see what the others'll make of 'im. They've been waggin' their tongues, now mayhaps they'll find I've not got such a grand treasure!"

And so it came about that little Jim began a very wretched existence of going about to house and farm to do a day's work. Had he

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been a jolly little darkey, he might have liked it, but he was sad-faced and scary; if any one looked at him hard while he was working he became confused. At the best, he was dreamy and absent-minded, spilt things, forgot what he was told, — his silence was taken for obstinacy, his downcast looks for sourness. But what really fastened evil renown upon him was that outrageous things happened when people's backs were turned, — things on a par with the cutting down of Louisa's clothes line. "The spite he's got in him!" was said; "an' the darin'ness!"

Many a sly slap did little Jim get, many an uneatable meal.

In this way the summer wore on.

Kitty Merryweather had long ago stripped Jim's little room of its belongings; even the crooked geranium, being in bloom, was taken down-stairs to decorate Kitty's kitchen; nothing remained except the mattress, from which the yellow comforter, once its pride, was removed.

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Fortunately the weather was warm, the child suffered no great discomfort, and this world is so arranged that one is seldom too forlorn to find consolation somewhere.

Jim found his in the blue sky. Often, when he had leisure, and sometimes, it must be confessed, when he should have been working, he would just gaze and gaze into that blue sky. What he thought it would be impossible to say. At home, on the old plantation, it had been said of Jim that "he didn't quite have all." Perhaps that was true. Perhaps it was true, too, that he had something just a little different from that which is usually dominated "all;" the faintest and tiniest touch of that something which perceives beauty where those who have "all" are oftentimes too busy and troubled about other things to perceive it in the least. Not that that something had any business in a little nigger too ignorant to write his own name and only three generations removed from the jungle. It hadn't. It made him dreamy, and moony, and stupid, and clumsy;

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— and yet it did this for him, it gave him moments of peace and comfort; it gave a charm to the sky, and to the fleecy clouds, and to the soft summer light and sheen on fields and hedges. The moment that Jim looked at these things, and felt himself alone with them, the alien world around him faded, he felt far away; they exerted a magic influence; home appeared, and he seemed to hear familiar voices singing:

"Who dat a-callin'?
Who dat a-callin'?
Who dat a-callin' me?"

There was one place in particular where his eyes continually wandered; that was up to the great hill of Partletts', up to that spot on the very summit where the dark firs raised their pointed tops straight into the very middle of the sky. There the sky seemed bluest, the sunshine brightest, there the birds circled, circled, far away from Partlettsville, its bareness and ugliness.

One day Kitty Merryweather came upon him as he had his eyes fixed upon the hill.

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"I'll tell you what's up there!" she said. "You go up the side of the hill, an' yo' come on old shoemaker Simon's cottage. He lives up there with his beast, the fiercest ever you see, — a dog what scowls at you like this; an' would finish a critter like you in a gobble! An' you know what's up there in a little house just t'other side o' the brow o' the hill? An old witch, — I go up there an' work for her, just to hear her talk, an' to tell folks about her. Her name's Beevish — Witch Beevish, we calls her. But they do say that when she lived out in the big world she had a fine house somewheres, an' her carridge, an' her 'orses, an' her servants, — but somethin' went wrong with her folks; they turned on her, or she on them, an' by some hook or crook they got her money from her. Anyhow, she couldn't stand bein' with her own kind no more, an' she's come down in the world somethin' terrible! Yo' see the little path past the shoemaker's, — steep as your hand, ain't it? That's the way I take, an' when I come to that first pine tree, I dive right down into

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the hollow, an' there's her 'ouse! I can see the smoke from her chimney this minute, between the big pine an' the little one. She's got a garden there — well, witches can make things grow! There's somethin' strange about her, sure!" cackled Kitty. "An' you look sharp an' draw me some water now, or some fine day I'll be fetchin' you up there, an' she'll bewitch yo' sure! Turn yo' into a tree, most like, or a frog!"

After that, whenever Jim was lazy, or did his work badly, or whenever she found him gazing at the hill, she would cry out:

"Hi, hi, now, the old witch'll git yo'! Witch Beevish'll be bewitchin' you sure!"

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CHAPTER V

"— AND HANG HIM"

In the meantime the Summer wore on, the days were growing a bit shorter, the mornings cooler. In the parsonage garden — the only garden in Partlettsville that could boast a few fine grapevines — the grapes had ripened; they were very sound and large this year, and they were being picked. Ordinarily this task was undertaken by Mrs. Carruthers and the old Scotch servant, Elsa; but this year Elsa's rheumatism was very bad, and frail little Mrs. Carruthers was not well. The grape picking had been allotted to Jim.

And now, this bright, mild September morning, a terrible thing had happened! A big bushel basket of the finest of the grapes had been upset, the grapes thrown out in the

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gravelled garden path, and not only mashed, but, as Mr. Carruthers affirmed, deliberately trampled upon! It was past understanding, and Jim, who had been left alone at his work, could give no accounting. What made matters worse was that, early in the Summer, when he was picking the gooseberries, the same thing had happened; and tales of like "accidents" were frequently reported through the neighborhood.

Now, Jim stood miserably shuffling his feet in the dirt, rolling his eyes, his black expressionless little face impossible to read, while Mr. Carruthers stood accusingly before him. Old Elsa leaned in the kitchen door, wiping a plate as she stood, for her hands were never idle; Mrs. Carruthers, pale and anxious-eyed, beside her, and the eight Carruthers children crowding against the window-pane, from twelve year old Harry, pale and sensitive like his mother, to yellow-haired, merry little Margy, the baby of the family, who had not been in this world long enough to comprehend that everything should come under

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the head of duty and discipline, and who still shook her golden curls, and roguishly and defiantly winked her blue eyes in the face, as Elsa would say, "of the Maister hisself!"

The "Maister" stood now very stiff-backed and rigid, his tall, lean figure drawn up commandingly, and every minute Jim grew more frightened and unable to find a word for himself.

"I want to understand," came the minister's keen, clear voice, "why you upset that basket. Come, make a clean breast of it!"

"I — I never done it, sah!" stammered Jim at last.

Mr. Carruthers started.

"Now, now!" he exclaimed warningly, raising his long forefinger, "that's what you told me when you upset the gooseberries! I passed it over then, but I'll not pass over a second lie. Do an ill deed and confess it; or, do an ill deed and stick to a denial of it, — there's the difference between a person who is not all bad and one who is! There's some hope for the former! There's none for

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the latter!" he finished decidedly, with a straightening of his lips.

It was far beyond Jim, at this moment, to follow the sense of Mr. Carruthers' words, but he felt the stern blue eyes upon him, he knew that he must speak, and, after a death-like silence, he brought out the exact truth.

"I — I ain't got nothin' to say, sah!" Then, as the ominous silence warned him that this would not do, he shuffled his feet in dumb confusion.

"Come, out with it!" exclaimed the keen voice again. "Remember, you must say something! Speak the truth!"

Jim gave a hasty, scared glance about him, and thus hard-pressed, muttered:

"I — I ain't *seen* nobody, sah, but I'se — I'se a *feelin'* dat somebody done crope up on me, an' upset dat basket — " he stopped, choked, and was again dumb.

"Impossible!" the clear voice came emphatically, and this time with passion in it. "Who in the world —? But it is utterly useless to parley further! Come with me!"

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A firm hand was laid on Jim's shoulder. It guided him into the house, and into the minister's study. As the door closed a timid voice was heard to whisper something; Mr. Carruthers opened it again and looked into the pleading face of his wife. He stepped out into the hall, shutting the door behind him.

Mrs. Carruthers paused. It was no light matter to interfere with her husband in the discharge of his duty, but, after a moment, she laid her hand on his arm.

"Henry, I know that whatever you do is right," she whispered, voicing a sentiment that reigned supreme in this household. "But I *must* beg you to remember that it is a delicate child; at least — " she hesitated, "he appears so to me; and — I pity him!"

"I pity him, too," replied her husband in his gravest tones, "because he has no knowledge of truth, of rectitude, and I wish to help him. You know well that he has done wrong, not only to us but to others, and on such occasions he *always* lies! I have forbidden anyone in this town to lay a hand on him,

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for I will not have a child ill-treated here. But if I do not allow others to punish him, then I must punish him myself as an act of simple justice. You must not make yourself unhappy, my dear," he added kindly, but in a tone that admitted of no argument. "It is," he added, his face and figure becoming slightly more rigid, "an unpleasant duty, — a very painful one, but I shall perform it!"

Then little Mrs. Carruthers knew that it was useless to speak further. From a painful duty her husband never flinched, whether it was such a one as now lay before him, or whether it was to walk miles through the darkest of nights and heavy snows to some far-off parishioner, who, "perchance *might* need him." Henry Carruthers in his criticisms and judgments did not spare others, but then, on the other hand, he never spared himself. He laid down the straightest, strictest, sternest line of conduct, and he adhered to it, firm-lipped and undeviating. If others deviated, they were, in his opinion, marked men, to be exhorted, driven, frightened some-

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how back into the path. He was a minister, a religionist, of the old school, and, in those days, this was a serious, earnest, terrible business, — as little Mrs. Carruthers had come to know well.

She turned away now, and, going to her own room, softly closed the door and sat down before a picture of the Sistine Madonna which hung upon her wall there. It was the only beautiful thing she owned, and she had brought it, long ago, from her own home. It consoled her to look into the noble, serene face, and she often came and sat so when overburdened or discouraged, — or, when one of her own children was ordered into the study, trying not to listen, and to quiet the beating of her heart.

But to-day it seemed even worse than when it was one of her own, for they, being her own, she could comfort; sooner or later, she could console, as she so well knew how to console! But this was a little outcast, — there was not a tender hand or voice in the world to cheer or sympathize!

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And the eyes of the frail woman, whose own life was overburdened with cares and exactions, filled with tears of warm sympathy for the little darkey whom all Partlettsville had come to regard as a "bad un," and humorously called "little Mr. Nigger."

When that dreadful fifteen minutes in the minister's study was over, and Mr. Carruthers told Jim to put on his coat again, and hung up a certain little strap in its accustomed place behind his desk, Mrs. Carruthers, up-stairs, heard the study door open, and she softly glided down and paused in a curve of the staircase. When Jim passed out of the front door to face once more an unfriendly little world, she followed, with her quick, light step. But a step as quick as her own caused her to start, and her husband's hand was laid detainingly on her arm. "Nay, nay, now, my lass, you must na' be undoin' my work!" he said in a low tone. She was the only creature in the world before whom he ever relaxed his stern face, and spoke tenderly; when he did, he always fell

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into his loved Scotch, — it was dear to his heart, and, besides, it helped him to express the softer feeling.

She looked now into his face; in spite of the kindness of his tone, his expression of conviction and determination was immovable. She sighed, and slightly turned. But he saw something in her face too, and he said with unwonted tenderness:

"Nay, lass, don't grieve; leave such troubles to me and go and rest yourself, if only for a wee while; it's plain to my eye that you need it, and, you know, it's care you should be taking of yourself just now!"

She went obediently to her room, and lay down upon her bed; but rest she could not; her heart was oppressed, and it beat heavily. She raised her eyes and looked at the benign face in the picture, but it did not comfort.

At length she whispered: "O Lord, there is so much in this world that we cannot understand! I pray Thee, out of Thy deep, boundless mercy, to help any who may be friendless, forlorn, or sorrowful!" She

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hesitated, then added: "And I pray Thee to forgive us all our mistakes! *Out of Thy mercy,* O Lord! Amen."

Then, in her woman's weakness, having done what she could, — uttered a sincere prayer, — she was consoled, and turned her head upon her pillow and slept.

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CHAPTER VI

JIM GOES TO PARTLETTS'

In Partlettsville it was very soon known what a dreadful disgrace had happened to Jim.

And Jim, himself, felt it so deeply that, instead of going back to Kitty Merryweather's, he went off by himself to a quiet spot near the stream that flowed along the outskirts of the town, and throwing himself down in the long grass, covered his eyes with his arm.

Never in his life had he been so frightened and shaken. Often he had been slapped and pinched by the inhabitants of Partlettsville; often, too, in the old days, he had been cuffed by his father, and even by his Grandmammy, most patient of souls! But this terrible thing, this chastisement in form by the tall, white gentleman with the stern lips and grave

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eyes, in his own study, or, as Jim put it to himself — "in de white folks' own pa'lor!" — had something in it ominous and soul-subduing.

He lay in the long grass and shivered. He still seemed to see the minister's face, its natural pallor accentuated by his black, close trimmed beard, and dark, smouldering eyes. He looked just as Jim had seen him in the pulpit, preaching, in his Grandmammy's time. Kitty Merryweather, too, sometimes took him to church, and when Mr. Carruthers stood up, authoritative, in his black garb, he had always seemed to Jim the very representative of all the high powers, spiritual and temporal.

Jim had not cried at all for the pain of his punishment; he had been far too terrified and overawed to utter a sound. He did not cry now, he only lay in the long grass and whimpered slightly, and he thought he could never face the unfriendly little world about him again.

But there was one person who seldom for-

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got about Jim, partly for reasons of his own, partly because he had been given a general order to "keep a eye on him!" And this he fulfilled so well that it may be said not for a whole hour of any day did he entirely lose track of him.

Willie Merryweather knew now where Jim was, and informing some of his choice companions that: "Happen he knew where Mr. Nigger was restin' after his last trick!"—he set off, accompanied by his sister Maggie and three or four others of the promising youths of Partlettsville.

Suddenly Jim, lying in the grass, heard a snicker so near that he started up, and gave out his usual alarmed cry of "Who dar?"

The grasses rustled and were still again; and then faces seemed to bob up all about him, expressive of various degrees of laughter or maliciousness.

Willie Merryweather, suddenly inspired, nudged the companion next him, and whispered:

"Here, offer 'im these fine pieces of

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candy! Happen he's hungry, since he ain't come home to eat no dinner. Offer 'em perlite!" he added.

The boy accordingly held out to Jim, on the palm of his hand, some tiny red glazed-looking bits.

"Here, have a taste!" he said in a kindly voice.

A more astute person than Jim might have mistrusted. But Jim looked up; the bits were coral red, they looked pretty in the outstretched hand, and the hand was not Willie Merryweather's. Jim took the bright things, put them into his mouth, and chewed. The next instant the tears were running down his face; he was gasping and spluttering, while a cackling of delight rose from the grass on all sides, and Willie Merryweather was so overcome by the intoxicating funniness of it that he rolled over and over in the soft grasses, catching, now at them, now at his head, and crying out:

"Oh — my — eye! Oh, look — at — him! Oh — my — eye!"

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And Jim kept gasping and spluttering, with his face comically twisted on one side, while the water was wrung from his eyes.

For what they had given him was not candy at all, but tiny, hot, red peppers; and if you doubt if they *are* hot, try one for yourself sometime.

Now, the time comes to every one in this world when he has borne all that he can. When Jim cleared his vision, and the first thing he saw was Willie Merryweather's usually pale face all aglow with the most exquisite enjoyment, he felt something burn within him, and his eyes blurred again, but this time it was not with the hotness of the peppers.

"Yo' is de meanes', an' lowes' downes', white boy I is ever seen!" he began, the white of his eyes showing, and a sort of pallor appearing under his dark skin. "Yes, yo' is!" he went on, though Willie had sprung to his feet. It was the first time Jim had ever spoken in his own defence, and, though he must have felt the futility of it,

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the impetus of his own feelings carried him on. "Yes, yo' is!" he reiterated. "Yo' is!" shying a little away from Willie, who stood head and shoulders above him, and who now had taken an attitude of "coming on."

"An' ef!" went on Jim, in a last desperate outburst, "I was to tell de ha'f o' de mean tricks yo' dun play on me—!"

But he never told, nor did he ever finish his sentence, for a blow from Willie's fist well planted in his chest sent him sprawling; the grass rustled under him, and a few little pebbles, dislodged, sprang away and plumped into the stream below.

"You'll back-talk me, will you?" asked Willie, standing over him, hands on hips, and his red hair on end. "I guess not, you low down nigger, you! The minister licked you this mornin', an' I'm for keepin' you in your place! Don't you budge!" as Jim made a little scramble to get up. "I'll keep you there as long as I've a mind to!"

Jim lay panting, looking helplessly at his

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adversary. The other boys, following the bully's lead, snickered.

But one heart here was moved. Little Maggie Merryweather, a brown-eyed little girl, with a gentle expression, stole forth timidly.

"Willie," she whispered, "let him up now! You've done enough!"

"An' what business of yours!" cried Willie, flaring round. "My eye! What business!"

And Maggie retired, for Willie was supreme ruler in their house. When Maggie raised a protest Kitty always silenced her with: "H'm, an' what's you to talk? You'd better be showin' respect for your men-folk! Happen you'll be asking your bread and butter of him by an' by!"

So Jim's one friend retired, and it appeared that there was no one either brave enough or kind enough to raise a voice.

Now it happened that, at this minute, had any one looked up at the bare, steep road that led down from Partletts', he would have seen

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something crawling and zigzagging slowly down that incline. Slowly, very slowly, it approached, and now that it neared the foot of the hill, one could discern what it was; — an old horse, lame in the right fore leg, drawing a battered vehicle which might once have been in the nature of an open carriage, but would now unquestionably be described as a rattletrap, and on its front seat, holding the reins, was a figure, broad, sturdy, with something red wrapped about head and shoulders — whether man or woman, at this distance, could not be said.

On came the old carriage through the bright, warm sunshine, swaying and tottering, then rattling most fearfully as it turned into the hard road; for every joint was creaking, every spring broken, and the wheels turned wearily and uncertainly, as if every revolution would be their last.

A crazy sight! But no one saw it, for the eyes of every one in the little group about Jim were fastened on Willie Merryweather, to see what he would next do.

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Willie, thus situated, feeling himself the hero of the hour, intended to rise to the occasion; he intended to do something manly and surprising; he wished to amaze them all, and give them something to talk about. His flushed face gradually paled, so that his freckles stood out plainly, and a queer sort of livid white appeared about his nose and mouth. Little Maggie could have told the meaning of that look; it meant that he was about to do the very meanest thing that he could think of. In fact Willie would not have dared do what he contemplated, save for the fact that Jim had been punished by Mr. Carruthers. If he was in disfavor with the minister he was indeed a criminal, and should be treated as such by right-minded persons. This would be as clear as day to every one; and he even felt a sort of lordly expansion, as if he were, in a way, seconding the efforts of an infallible power.

Suddenly he stood away from Jim, and said:

"Stand up!"

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It was hard to obey such a master, and Jim hesitated, but Willie making a suggestive movement with his foot, he arose.

"Now I'm going to do something that'll surprise you. You won't like it, but it'll be good for you!" said Willie, winking at the others. "Now, you do just as I tell you! Every time I count, you step back a pace, I follows, an' we see what 'appens! Now,—one!"

Jim stepped backward a pace, and Willie forward.

"Two!" And they stood looking at each other, Willie grinning now, and Jim's eyes round with anxiety.

"Three! Four!"

"I can't go no furder!" exclaimed Jim, glancing over his shoulder, and seeing the edge of the river-bank right behind him.

"You ain't asked to!" supplemented Willie, and before any one could draw breath there was a splash and a splutter, and a cry of terror from the water and one of amazement from the bank. For the second time,

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Willie had planted his fist in Jim's chest, and the little darkey had doubled up like a clasp-knife and gone over backwards into the shallow, swift-flowing little stream.

For just an instant there was a dead silence, and then it was broken by a strong, hoarse voice, which had a deep vibration in it.

"Now, what is the meaning of that?" it asked.

The consternation in the little group was immediate; every one turned, and Willie Merryweather whirled around, surprised into uttering an oath, — a luxury he did not often allow himself, because he had a good voice, and was proud of singing in the church choir; should the minister hear he swore, he would not be allowed to appear there again.

All gazed, and no wonder! The fantastic old vehicle had come up to them and stopped. The old horse stood shuffling his feet in the dust; the figure in the front seat had arisen, thrown back the red drapery, which appeared much like an ancient piece of patchwork, ex-

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posing a head tightly wound round with a long strip of red cambric in place of a hat; and strong, bronzed, hawk-like features.

All were somewhat impressed, and all appeared frightened. The smaller children jumped back behind the long grass.

"Witch Beevish! The old Witch!" was whispered.

"What was that done for?" came the strong voice again, and the strange figure stood, pointing at Willie Merryweather. "You — you, who did the deed, answer me!"

"I — I, er —" he began. But Witch Beevish had laid down the reins and was already climbing out of her equipage. A difficult performance, for now it was to be seen that she was a stout, broad woman, very heavily made, and, as she grasped the side of the seat and reached with her foot for the step, the whole edifice tottered, shook and careened as if it must surely topple over sidewise with her weight and end its long career of usefulness here in the dust.

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But she reached earth without accident, and walked forward.

"Child!" she cried in a loud voice to the invisible Jim; "child, come out of that water!"

But from the bank there came no movement. Jim was too frightened to appear. Others were frightened too, and the long grass shook as Willie's retainers quickly crept away, some on all fours. Now, Willie was no warrior bold. Seeing himself left alone, he thought it best in this emergency to disappear also. But at the first move a grasp was laid on him, so strong and determined that he realized there was no use in battling. He resigned himself with a sulky air, and, under her guidance, moved to the edge of the bank with "Witch Beevish."

There, cowering behind a big stone, was a little black, dripping figure. The woman looked a moment, then held out her hand.

"Come, child!" she said again in her commanding voice, and she half pulled, half supported Jim up the bank. He stood dripping

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and sniffling, bent over, looking very small. "Now," she said, pointing first to Jim, then to the stream, and speaking very distinctly, "why did *you* throw that *boy* in *there*?"

"Because," said Willie, trying to appear dignified, "because he's a bad un!"

"How is he a 'bad un'?"

"He lives with my mother, and he won't work for her!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the old woman, looking keenly at him, and slightly winking her eyes with an expression of assumed astonishment. "Is that so? Yes, I've heard he lives with your mother, and I'll warrant one thing—if he lives with her, he works for her!" she added emphatically.

In assisting Jim she had been obliged to release Willie's arm; he had gradually edged further and further from her, until now, out of arm's reach, he began to feel bold again.

"Well, as happens, it don't matter what you think!" he remarked impudently. "Nobody cares what *you* think! An' nobody's

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goin' to take sides with 'im either. It's proved he's a bad un, — the minister hisself licked him this mornin'! "

The woman flashed a look at him, and it could be seen that her eyes were dark blue and vivid.

" Him? What for? " she asked slowly.

" 'Cause," said Willie, beginning to chuckle, and pointing at Jim, " when he was alone in the garden, a basket o' grapes — finest of the crop — is spilled, knocked over, trompled on! An' Mr. Carruthers, when he finds it out, didn't he give it to him though! Didn't he wallop him! "

" Whipped *him!* " said the woman, pointing to the figure of little Jim, which could be seen plainly beneath his thin, dripping clothes, — " for a basket of grapes! Faugh! Fine work! Fine! " she went on, her face beginning to twitch, and her eyes seeming to concentrate themselves into two points of blue fire, while she turned toward the parsonage, and shook her fist in its direction. " Your grapes were spoiled, *yours,* you mas-

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ter of souls! You salt of the earth! Yes, I know you, and your kind! — your hearts are as hard as flint! And do you suppose that God hears your prayers? — a God of kindness — ! " But her discourse was suddenly interrupted by a low voice:

" An' there's not a doubt, ma'am, but you're much better acquainted with the Lord Almighty, than the parson is! " said the voice in a respectful tone.

The old woman started; she turned with the quickness of lightning and grasped at the mocking boy. But he was already in the road, doubled over with laughter.

" A fine preachin'! Fine! " he shouted. " An' now I must be biddin' you good-by. As for you — " he said to Jim, " we'll be seein' you at our 'ouse later, an' my mother'll 'tend to you! Good-by, fossil! " he finished, striking at the old horse, which had stood during the whole encounter, its head lowered, fast asleep.

He had already started on a run, and his stroke at the horse's head missed. But the

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woman saw, and, with a quickness which was wonderful, she sprang over the grass and into the road. She missed Willie by a hand's length; her face was flaming with anger and excitement, and her outstretched fingers trembled.

"If I had caught you!" she muttered.

A loud laugh of derision answered, and Willie's fleeing heels disappeared in a cloud of sunlit dust.

For fully a minute the woman stood looking at the bare, plain little town as it lay outspread in the sunlight, an expression of defiance and bitterness on her compressed lips, as if she would have challenged the very houses to come forth and do battle. Then she turned, her eyes rested on the miserable, shrinking figure of little Jim, and her face gradually changed.

"Come, child," she said. "Come home with me in my carriage," and drawing herself up and straightening the strange crimson headdress, she took Jim's hand. "There,

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jump in, and I will cover you with the robe."

It was true that as Jim stepped on to the floor of the strange vehicle a loose board flew up and all but struck him in the face, and the "robe" consisted of the old patchwork drapery. But Jim was scarcely one to criticize. He sat in the back seat, wrapped in the robe, which, after all, was warm, gazing dumbly at the square, firm shoulders in front of him, in a kind of trance, too cold, frightened and bewildered to think or even to observe.

They went what seemed a long, long distance, the old horse always at a walk, along the highroad, circling the whole hill of Partletts', and then crossing a little bridge and turning into the woods, they began gradually to ascend it. Partlettsville was no longer in sight; this was the side of the hill hidden from the town, nor was there any house in sight, only the narrow road, and trees upon trees, firs, pine, dogwood turning bright red and covered with scarlet berries, great sycamores and chestnuts, all clustering close, and slo-

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ping away down the hillside in a great mass of autumn glory.

The sun was beginning to decline; its golden rays became red; a bright mist gathered, crept up the valley and clung among the tree-tops, dim and purplish, softening all.

Jim had begun to feel aroused. He was looking about him, at the clustering trees, at the dogwood that made him think of home, at the golden-rod that grew along the road as high as the carriage wheels. Suddenly he gave a cry.

They had turned a bend in the road; there was a wide opening between the heavy growth of trees, and there, in the near distance, stood a tiny cottage covered with vines, and all about it bloomed a garden — such a garden! Salvias, asters, chrysanthemums were banked together in a luxuriant confusion, — all lying dim in the last gentle rays of the sun, like a fairy plantation. And, sloping away from it, down the hillside, the heavy forest of trees with all their changing

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shades, down, down, miles away to where a tiny white shelf of beach could be seen, and beyond, softly surging, reflecting the lights of the bright evening sky on its deep, deep blue breast flecked with white, rolled the ocean! Already, far down there, scores of little lights were beginning to glow out from cottages and fishers' huts along the beach, and though they were miles away there was an inexpressible charm and friendliness in their appearance.

The old woman drew up her horse; she turned and looked at Jim, and after a glance at his little black, staring face, she slightly smiled.

"That," she said, extending her arm, and speaking with a peculiar mixture of gentleness and pride, "is mine! All mine, to enjoy, to watch, and to love! Those over there," she added with scorn, pointing to the brow of the hill above them, below which, far in the valley on the other side, lay Partlettsville, "they know nothing of it, care nothing for it. All they know is that this is

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a steep place, hard to get at, impossible, they call it, in winter. Why, one hour here is worth a lifetime in their bleak little hole! Child, when I came here I would have been their friend, they could have been mine; I wanted friends, God knows! But they would have none of me! People about here say that Partlettsville was built on the wrong side of the hill, but I say, no! It was built on the right side! Those people down there, they have narrow, cold souls! Why, then," she exclaimed vehemently, "should the brightest sunshine fall on them? Or nature bloom for them? Nature," she said, looking at Jim, and nodding her head emphatically, "blooms for those who love her. No, no, let be — let be! They belong there, and I here. And, thank God, I have it, in its beauty, alone! Mine, child, mine! My home!" She finished with passion, tears beginning to course her cheeks. She put up her hand and straightened her strange headdress, her strong old face drawn by some inward agitation, her eyes flashing, and her hawk-like profile stand-

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ing out clear, sharp, and stern as a man's in the glow of the waning light.

Had any of those of whom she spoke seen her at this moment they would undoubtedly have declared that the old Witch was in one of her crazy spells!

But, as it was, her audience was not critical. True, Jim saw in her a strange being, but he also saw in her a rescuer. He had heard that she was crazy, but the simple child did not fear her. He looked at her with a kind of innocent wonder, and he felt confidence in her. She had brought him to a beautiful place; — the most beautiful place he had seen since he left his far-off home. He gathered that she hated and even feared the people of Partlettsville; he, too, hated and feared them; and he saw from her looks that all the beauty that was spread about them was dear to her. And deep, deep down in his heart, he understood that feeling, though he could not tell of it, and had no way of showing it. No, he had no way of showing it, but as the old woman looked into

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his little black face, which had a sort of happy, awed expression upon it, she picked up the reins with a look of satisfaction and turned the old horse toward the tiny cottage.

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CHAPTER VII

JOHN

It was on the very edge of Winter; already the little stream that flowed round Partlettsville appeared motionless, covered with a thin coating of ice. The fall winds had stripped the last leaves from the old willows that bordered the high road, and their thin, whip-like branches swayed and rattled mournfully. The inhabitants of Partlettsville, looking up at the great hill, saw only trees stripped of their bright foliage, save at the very top, where a few tall firs, and the big pine and the little one, stood up as green as ever against the sky.

Nothing much ever happened in Partlettsville, but now something had happened. The old French shoemaker who had lived here for five years — it was said, on nothing, because he spent so little — but who had done

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a good business, and saved money, had moved away. Some said he had saved a fortune; that he was going back to France; but others said this was no such thing, — he was merely moving a matter of a score of miles or so, up the road, to a bigger town, and a bigger business. Probably a correct guess this; for he sold none of his belongings, taking all with him, down to every least scrap of kindling wood; down, it was said, to a bundle of old rags and a lot of empty match boxes. For old Simon under no circumstances ever threw away a thing.

There was one possession of his, however, which he did leave behind; it had been extremely useful to him during the five years that he had lived in the little house, and, — either there could have been no room for it in the cart, or else he was assured he could replace it where he was going, or very likely it chanced that its day of usefulness was over for him. At any rate, this one possession the old French miser left behind him, — his dog.

As he was about to climb into the furni-

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ture cart he had looked over the gate into the dog's face.

"Mind ze place, John Frenchy, *mon garçon!*" he had said with a grin, "until you see me again! And zat will be ze long, long time!" he added. Then he climbed into the cart, sat himself down beside the driver, took out his pipe, and went off, without once troubling to look back. And John Frenchy, seated in the walk before the tiny cottage, understood well the first part of the injunction, which had been given him many times before, but the latter part he understood not at all.

This John Frenchy was the biggest and ugliest cur that the inhabitants of Partlettsville had ever seen. Kitty was right when she informed Jim that he was "the fiercest ever you saw!" Perhaps he was about the fiercest and ugliest that anybody ever saw. And he had a temper that matched his outside. He had been given to Simon by a French peddler, a tramp, who passed through the town years before; and it was

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evident that in his youth some one had used him ill.

Some one, when he was a puppy — perhaps it was the peddler — had "trimmed him up." His tail had been cut off at the root. Literally, he had no tail at all, not even a stump; and he was in much the same case as to ears. Where these should have been there were only to be found little ridges under the fur. Perhaps it was this that interfered with his hearing, or, perhaps, he had been born partially deaf; at any rate, he heard very ill, but he made up for this by the keenest scent in the world.

He was a mongrel, with tawny hair, heavy and rather shaggy, striped here and there with black, especially about the face; here the black streaks came down between his brows, looking like furrows and giving him all the appearance of scowling most horribly; his rather small, bright, spiteful, suspicious eyes carried out the impression of a scowl, and his whole, great, earless head was fearsome, especially when, as was often

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the case, the lips were drawn back in a snarl, exposing the long fangs on either side of the big mouth.

Old Simon had accepted him from the peddler because of his evil temper. The old man, like all misers, kept every cent of his money hidden in his house. This was well known, and country credulity had swelled the amount of his savings into something quite vast for this little corner of the world. The old man, before the coming of the dog, had never felt quite comfortable; after he came he never gave himself a moment's uneasiness at home or abroad; John Frenchy could and would have kept at bay a small army — or, to be more practical and explicit, he would have throttled without the slightest hesitation any one who had stepped foot, uninvited, within the old man's gate. Not only did he protect house and yard but he considered that he and his master owned the road before it, so that pedestrians had to make a détour, and the grass grew on the little dirt sidewalk before the cottage.

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As may be believed, this did not increase his popularity among the inhabitants of Partlettsville, but it suited old Simon. He would chuckle and grin when the dog's great bellow warned him of some approach, and run out on his little porch, rubbing his hands, and crying out:

"John Frenchy, *mon garçon,* he comes to me on business, — let him pass!" And to the visitor: "You do well to hesitate, to wait for ze pear-misse-on! He would kill you, ze John Frenchy, he would kill you!"

And no one, looking into John Frenchy's face, made the slightest doubt of the matter.

And then, when old Simon was going out, it was always with a meaning grin:

"Keep ze place for me, John Frenchy! Keep house for me, *mon ex-ze-lent garçon!*"

And this John Frenchy invariably had done, and this he proceeded to do on the present occasion — only the absence of his master was very, very long!

All during the Fall, John Frenchy spent his time sitting in the little path and watch-

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ing, then stalking to the big hogshead, turned over on its side, which served him for a kennel, and again watching. And how much he comprehended of the passage of time is not recorded. But there is one sure timepiece for man and beast — hunger. When John Frenchy watched his house until he became ravenous he would make a dash up the hill of Partletts', scent out a rabbit, secure it, and come loping home, the dead thing hanging from his mouth, retire to his hogshead bristling and growling to himself, and devour every morsel, bones and all, with the exception perhaps of a few shreds of fur. Woe betide any creature who had come near him then! And those who saw him in the distance, coming down the hillside after one of his forays, his bloody prey in his mouth, shuddered as if they had seen a wolf or other wild creature.

And, indeed, the great mongrel began somewhat to wear that appearance; he grew so lean that his body looked long and sinewy; his eyes and face became fiercer; at the

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sound of human voices, even on the high-road, his stiff hair bristled, and he gave out his furious bellow.

He barked most of the time now, and the heavy, deep reverberation seemed to ring against the hill and echo back over the little town.

"Pity as somebody don't put a load o' lead into him!" remarked Gus Schaftsmire, the butcher's son, — a fair-haired youth of about nineteen, who prided himself on being a sport and understanding something of the breeding and points of dogs. "He's the lowest-down lookin' scoundrel ever I see! And you can bet your life, with all his size and noise, a dirty coward at heart! I never see one of them curs but what he was a coward! It stands to reason a dog can't have no quality when he ain't got no good blood!"

It was to be observed, however, that, in delivering his orders, Mr. Gus made as wide a détour around John Frenchy's abode as any one.

"An' what's the reason of his infernal

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barkin' over nothin'?" some one asked. "He never used to do so."

"Lonesomeness, most like," answered Gus contemptuously. "When dogs is lonesome, they mostly barks. Not havin' nobody to speak to, you see," he added facetiously, "he just nacherly wants to hear the sound of his own voice."

One day, wishing to show his contempt for the now cadaverous-looking beast, and fancying himself quite at a safe distance, Gus stood up in his wagon, threw a stone, which struck on John Frenchy's hogshead kennel, and drove away, chuckling, at top speed. But the chuckle died in his throat. The great beast leaped out at the challenge; every hair on end, he placed his assailant instantly and was over the fence and after the wagon, his eyes blazing and his tongue lolling from the side of his mouth. Gus did not stop to try out whether John Frenchy was a coward or not! Leaning over the dashboard, he began to lash his horse. And soon the strange spectacle was seen rushing down the

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quiet street of Partlettsville, Gus, his florid face very white, leaning over his horse, lashing it across the neck, and a few rods behind, John Frenchy, lean, bristling, his eyes rolled up with deadly meaning upon the man.

Not a second too soon did Gus reach his father's shop, leap across the pavement, and slam the door. For, with the fall of the latch, John Frenchy's body was heard to crash against the wood, and those who were spectators to this scene declared that if the dog had been at all in proper form, without a doubt he would have caught the youth.

"An' what would 'a' happened then?" was asked significantly.

Gus had always hated John Frenchy with, as it were, a sporting hatred, because he was low-bred, and had no "form" or "points;" but after this he hated him with a personal hatred. And, the excitement once over, there was no lack of those who put their tongues in their cheeks, and said:

"Coward — eh, Gussy! But who done the runnin', Gussy? Who done the runnin'?"

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"An' if I'd a gun in my hands, do you suppose I'd 'a' run?" shouted the valiant Schaftsmire.

"Well!" some one would bring out with a wink, "you had your whip, hadn't you?"

"Whip! Huh!—if you'd seen the face of him!" the other would reply surlily; and then, his florid face flushing with mortification, "but I'll get up with him some day!"

After this adventure it was felt by all that it was a dangerous matter for such a ferocious, wild-like creature to be at large. There followed a great fastening up of gates, lest he might prowl; and if, impelled by hunger, he showed his tawny hide near a dwelling, there was such a scuttling indoors and rain of missiles from windows as would have done honor to a jungle tiger himself.

But this happened less and less often. The more John Frenchy was shunned, the more he shunned others. In the first place, he had been taught by his old master to regard

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these people with suspicion; in the second, though he was hideous, and a mongrel from his head to his heels, yet he had a pride of his own. He visited the back yards and scrap pans of Partlettsville far less often than any of the owners thereof could have been brought to believe.

No, he fell back on wild things, and his ability to kill. Wild prey for the wild dog! The serious trouble with this was, that so near the habitations of man, within the sound of voices, and sight of chimneys, there was a decidedly meagre supply of wild prey. Had he roamed far, over the opposite side of the hill of Partletts', beyond the Witch's house, into the lonely woods that sloped toward the ocean, he would have found what he needed a-plenty. But he kept to the near side of the hill; for John Frenchy had it fixed firmly in his dog's brain that he was watching the house for his master, and along the whole of this side of the hill he could keep the deserted house and tiny yard within his sight.

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The person who oftenest saw him on his forays was Will Michaelson, a wood-cutter, who often stole up the side of the hill at night and felled a tree, because the owner of all this property never came near it, and one might as well have the benefit of a little kindling wood! The only person he feared was Witch Beevish; she loved every tree on the hill, and raised such a clamor when one was felled, that, to get rid of her long tongue, he performed his business at night. It was true she had nothing to do with all this property; it was even said that the papers she held to her own bit of land were not good; but she behaved as if all were hers, and protected it as such.

Michaelson saw the wild dog, as he had come to be called, night after night, nosing through the leaves and underbrush, breathing and panting hard as he burrowed for his infrequent prey, and he gave him a wide berth. But once he had the scare of his life.

The night was overcast. It chanced that

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the dog had been progressing silently; so had Michaelson, when suddenly the moon broke through a rift, and there they were, face to face, in the narrow wood track! Michaelson said that the dog's eyes were bloodshot, his lips slobbering, and his whole face hunger-pinched and wildly intent upon the scent of some prey. He flung up his head when he saw his way blocked, and Michaelson believed that, deaf as the dog was, and having the scent of his prey in his nostrils, he had not been conscious of any other presence until the moonlight revealed the man before him. However that might be, he glared with the most awful expression of fury and disappointment. For one moment Michaelson thought he would spring at his throat, the next, he turned with a snarl and crashed away through the underbrush.

After this Michaelson took little pleasure in his nightly excursions.

"I tell you, there ain't room enough for me an' that feller on the hillside," he remarked emphatically.

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"Set a trap," some one advised sagely.

"An' so I will," he assented, looking a little puzzled as to how this was to be accomplished.

It happened soon after this that, John Frenchy being lamed, it was set down by many to be the dexterous work of Michaelson. Others, however, declared that the dog had been wounded by Gus Schaftsmire, who constantly carried a gun under the seat of his wagon, and had long declared he would shoot if he came within close range. Neither of these worthies denied the impeachment, and each received credit from his particular friends for being bold and clever enough to do up the big beast.

He was done up, sure enough, it was plain to be seen.

Standing on the highroad, one could look over the flat meadows and get a view of John Frenchy's yard and all that went on there. Any one watching at this time could see John Frenchy come out of his hogshead, make a painful hobble or two, and sink back upon

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his haunches. He could be seen, too, to nibble gingerly at his paw, and then lick it tenderly as if with a wish to nurse it back to usefulness.

This went on for three days. On the afternoon of the third, a little group of men, passing along the highroad, paused by the fence to look over John Frenchy's domain.

"He must be starvin' hungry down there, by this time," remarked one.

"Yes, it 'ud be a mercy to put a load o' shot into him now, — a mercy to him, an' to us, too," replied another.

"What is it?" asked a hoarse, strong voice from the rear.

The men turned with a jerk. The speaker was Witch Beevish, on one of her very infrequent passages through Partlettsville. "What are you looking at?" she asked again, as the men turned from her without troubling themselves to reply.

"Just old Simon's dog down there, — he's hurt," said one of the men negligently.

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"Hurt! Why doesn't some one help him?"

"It happens his master's away from home just at present!" spoke up one of the men with a grin.

"Then why not one of you?" said the old woman promptly.

"One of us!" They looked at her between amusement and incredulity. "Say, that's a good one!"

She had on her inevitable headdress of red cambric, and the carriage robe was now doing duty about her shoulders for a shawl; it was made up of twenty colors pieced together, and she carried the strangest little hand-bag of beads and worsted. She now began fishing in this, drew out a pair of spectacles, put them on, and then walking to the corner, turned up the narrow sidewalk that led to John Frenchy's house.

"Come back! Are you crazy?" shouted one of the men, his face actually turning pale. "Say — she ought to be fetched back!"

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But she was already nearing the little gate, and no one offered to execute this commission.

Then something like a miracle happened. She walked in at the gate of John Frenchy's yard and up to the hogshead in which the great beast lay. They could see her stop, but her back was toward them and the patchwork shawl of many colors obstructed the view so they could not see her hawklike old face turn pale for an instant as she looked into the wild dog's eyes, nor how firmly she set her lips and forced herself to look with a steady expression straight into his face. Neither could they hear her talk, talk to him all the while; nor could they hear the low moaning of John Frenchy from this distance, — she had heard it the moment she neared his house; he had probably kept it up for many hours, for the pain in his paw had become a burning anguish.

It seemed a long time, to those watching, before the old woman stood up, turned, and again came through the little gate. Oth-

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ers had joined the group by now, and all watched.

"'Tain't natural!" said some one; "it seems 'most like witch-craft!"

The old woman came forward, looked at them contemptuously, and taking off her spectacles, restored them to the worsted bag.

Now that she stood face to face with them, quite sound, their alarm vanished, and they began to nudge each other and snicker.

"What's the matter, Missis?" asked one, pretending much concern; "did you find out his ailments?"

She opened her hand and showed a long, crooked thorn.

"Good God!" exclaimed the man. "Did he let you take that out?"

"Well! an' more's the pity!" said a voice; "now he'll be on his all fours again!"

"Where's old Simon?" asked the old woman sharply. "Why doesn't he look after his own dog?"

"Ol' Simon! He's been gone long an'

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"SHE OPENED HER HAND AND SHOWED A LONG, CROOKED THORN."

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merry ago, never to come back! An' left his fine cur behind him!" It was Gus Schaftsmire's voice. He and Michaelson had come up in time to see the thorn displayed, and each wore a rather sheepish appearance.

The old woman stood still for a minute, looking from face to face.

"Ah!" she said slowly, nodding her head once or twice. Then she walked up to the fence rail; taking hold of it, she leaned over as if to make herself better heard, and yelled at the top of her voice — a stentorian voice — across the meadow.

"John Frenchy, you're deserted! It's the way of the world! Your usefulness is over to the person who owned you, and he's kicked you off, — it's the way of the world!" Her eyes began to flash, and her voice to vibrate with agitation, but it rang out as strong as ever. "I know what loneliness is, too!" she screamed. "And ingratitude, and falseness! — If you ever want a friend, come to one who is in like condition with yourself! You know where I live, — on the

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top of Partletts'. You've passed my house — I've seen you go by!" she shouted, precisely as if she were speaking to a person. The first part of her speech was dramatic and amusing enough, but these explicit directions to John Frenchy set the company off entirely. They burst into a roar of laughter.

"An' what's that you're talkin' to him? — dog talk?" was asked between guffaws. "An' was that what you talked to him down there, too?"

Witch Beevish turned slowly, and looked the man who spoke straight in the face:

"Yes, dog talk!"

This tickled him more than ever.

"An' could you teach it to me?" he asked ingratiatingly.

She looked at him as if considering his request.

"No," she said slowly, "*you* couldn't learn it! Only certain people know it, and no one teaches it to them,—they know it themselves. I can talk dog talk," she went on with perfect gravity, looking straight into

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the man's face with eyes that shone like points, "and bird talk, and the talk of all the creatures up there!" indicating Partletts' with a majestic sweep of her arm. With that she straightened her headdress, stalked with dignity through the now large ranks of her audience, climbed into her strange vehicle, and drove away with her head up, not again looking at a soul.

"Crazy as a loon!" murmured the man, blinking and rubbing his hand over his eyes. "And the stare she can give you!"

"Bird talk! Dog talk!" cackled Kitty Merryweather; "now is anybody ever 'eard the equal o' that!" and she went on up the street cackling, and turned in at Louisa Myers, to describe the scene to her, that stout person being in such a state of negligée that she had been obliged to miss the entertainment.

At the same moment Henry Carruthers, chancing to be standing at one of the rectory windows and seeing the strange-looking old woman drive past, her hawk face flushed and

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set, and her lips murmuring in a sort of aftermath of excitement, shook his head.

"Not a fit person for that child to be left with; I must get him away from her," he thought. But though he compressed his lips determinedly his eyes looked thoughtful.

Witch Beevish was a difficult adversary to try conclusions with!

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CHAPTER VIII

JOHN GOES TO PARTLETTS'

As was predicted, John Frenchy was soon on his all fours again, and resumed his nocturnal foraging.

One morning he lay in his so-called kennel after a very fruitless night of hunting. All the rabbits seemed to have departed to the opposite side of the hill of Partletts', and this was not pleasant to contemplate with Winter already on the scene; for this morning the sky was banked with heavy clouds that held a sure promise of snow, and a cutting wind swirled around the deserted cottage and tiny bare yard.

John Frenchy felt exceedingly ill-humored, and he had reason to be; not only was he hungry, he was cold. In spite of his hard, coarse coat, he shivered; he kept wrinkling up his fierce brows and scratching at

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the old cotton comforter which was long since worn into thin tatters, but which was the only thing resembling home comfort which John Frenchy knew. Worse than this, his hogshead had begun to leak, so that his floor was constantly damp. But it was the only abiding-place he had, and, as every creature must have some combination of things that form home, John Frenchy stuck to his, — consisting of one leaky hogshead, one old comforter, and one deluded and fixed idea that his place was here to watch his master's house.

It was true that thus far he had never been called upon to forcibly protect the place at all; the fact that John Frenchy and his fixed idea were on the premises was quite sufficient for all the neighbors.

But now, this morning, something quite out of the ordinary was happening!

A large, covered cart was rumbling along the highroad. Suddenly the rumbling ceased. John Frenchy looked out to see where the cart was going. It had turned at the corner

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and was rolling quietly along the earth road toward his gate! He could scarcely believe his eyes, but he sat quietly on the shadow of the hogshead and watched. Then stranger things happened. The cart came opposite, turned, and backed up half-way across the near sidewalk. The driver deliberately got down, blanketed his horses, unfastened the tail-board, and — blissfully ignorant of John Frenchy and his fixed idea — came unconcernedly forward to open the gate.

At last, then, it had come to John Frenchy to protect his master's property! With a roar, and a bound of his great body that shook the hogshead from stem to stern, he sprang on guard.

The driver, with an oath. slammed the gate and retreated.

"What the devil!" he roared. "Git out o' that, will you?"

He stood on the sidewalk and regarded John Frenchy, the shock of the surprise tingling in every nerve and irritating him to the last fibre of his being.

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"I'll fix you, all right!" he shouted at length, and, going over to his wagon, took out his long whip and made a valiant and threatening motion toward the dog.

"Now, will you git away?" he inquired.

John Frenchy did not budge. A slight rasping sound could be heard in his throat, and his hideous brows wrinkled together; at the same time his lips parted and were drawn back, ever so little, just to show what was beneath them.

The driver looked meditative.

"What are you doin' here, anyhow?" he asked after a while.

John Frenchy made no answer; he only rolled his eyes sidewise, showing the blood-shot white, and slightly shifted his paws.

"Well, well," said the man, deciding to try what conciliation would accomplish. "He's a good doggie! Good doggie! Let me by!" And reaching out, at arm's length, he tentatively laid two fingers on the gate.

John Frenchy eyed those two fingers. The rasp became a growl; there was a stif-

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fening of his whole body and a rising of the coarse hairs at the back of his head. The man sprang back — there was no misunderstanding the expression of those little fixed eyes!

"Curse you! You beast!" muttered the driver from the edge of the sidewalk. "What are you doin' here anyhow? Ain't you know I got to move in that cart load o' furniture? An' a storm comin' up! An' a —— cold business hanging 'round in this wind!"

Again John Frenchy shifted his paws and rolled his eyes. For his part, he no longer felt cold. The wind blew straight against his lean body and ruffled his coarse hair until it seemed to stand on end. But he was warm, — warmed by a feeling of animosity and rage against this intruder who made so free as to touch even the gate of his master's property; and he sat square in the little path, grim, immovable, as hotly zealous for his cause as if it had been a real one, and not merely a deluded, fixed idea.

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The driver looked about him for a while, and then, seeing a public house sign on the high street, he sauntered over there, looking as unconcerned as he might, and was soon telling his predicament to those already gathered about the bar. He gleaned but little assurance from their attitude. They were vastly amused, however, and laughed loud and long. Doubtless it was some such comedy as this which old Simon foresaw when he winked and told John Frenchy to watch the place. At any rate, his one-time landlord, the owner of the little cottage, was moving into it, and thus were his goods and chattels held up at his own gateway.

"An' you've the devil to face!" the driver was informed emphatically. "The devil hisself in that beast!"

"I see," remarked that person resignedly, over his second mug of beer. "It ain't no use."

He was a big, lazy-looking fellow, and the beer seemed to console him for his inability to get to work. He contented himself by

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sending word by a little urchin to the owner of the state of affairs, and then perforce made himself comfortable in the warm bar-room. During the morning he would walk to the end of the high street and look around the corner to "see how things was goin'." And each time, being refreshed by the sight of John Frenchy sitting bolt upright in the little path, not having budged an inch, returned to his quarters ruefully shaking his head.

But when it came time to bait his horses he was in a quandary indeed, for by this time he had heard so many tales of the fierceness of the big brute that he really felt he had been too venturesome this morning in walking so near the lion's mouth. At length, however, he essayed his task, a cudgel in one hand, a bucket of feed in the other. No one in Partlettsville offered to accompany him, and very wisely. For the hatred of John Frenchy for the inhabitants of Partlettsville far exceeded his hatred of a stranger.

He reached his wagon, maintaining ap-

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pearances, but feeling very shaky inwardly, and John Frenchy watched him with an eagerness and a look of readiness calculated to make one uncomfortable. The big beast made no motion, however; he allowed the man to secure his feed bags, hang them over his horses' ears, and walk away unmolested, for he understood perfectly what he was doing. He had seen horses fed before, and he had no desire to interfere; for though John Frenchy had become a prey to a fixed idea, he was no fool!

Thus the day wore on.

In the afternoon the snow came, very fine, whirling lightly over the frozen roads before the keen wind. And with the snow came the owner of the cottage, very angry, and violently proclaiming the fact. His advent was announced by a little boy posted to keep watch, who threw open the door of the bar-room, hurling in, along with a blast of cold air, the words:

"He's a-comin'!"

Sure enough, at the end of the high street

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a horseman had dismounted and was leading forward a jaded horse.

"What's the matter here?" he was asking excitedly on all sides. "What's the matter, I say?"

He was a small man with red moustache and whiskers, and little green eyes. The minute he caught sight of the driver he began to bawl:

"Why, in heaven's name, ain't you taken my things inside the house yonder? Don't you tell me none of your lies, — I don't want to hear 'em! Ain't you got no spunk? Ain't you a *man?* No," he yelled, dramatically answering his own question, "you ain't got the spunk of a feminine flea!" There were some gurgles of laughter, and the driver looked sheepish.

"Now, you follow me!" shouted the energetic little red-headed man. "I'll see what's the meanin' of this talk about keepin' a man out of his own property! And —" again to the driver, "you'll not get a cent for bringin' the goods over, do you see? It's

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your business to deliver them *inside* the house! So come along! I ain't payin' you for cowardice!"

The shouting and gesticulating had brought men, women, and children into the high street. Partlettsville was ever ready for a free show.

And now was to be seen the little red-headed-man walking briskly toward the corner, rolling his eyes back at the slouching driver, who lounged in his wake, but, sustained by numberless mugs of beer, he found sufficient courage to announce:

"That's all right! That's all right! Whatever any man darst, I darst!"

They came to the corner, looked around it, and paused.

There in the little path, in a swirl of fine snow, sat John Frenchy, just as he had sat all day, on guard, lean, alone. He saw the red-headed man, he saw the driver, — and then he stood up, lowered his head, and bristled, for he saw the Partlettsville folk. These he knew by instinct and by instruction

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to be his enemies. There was not one among them whom he did not hate; not one who did not hate him; not one who had not jeered at him and threatened him; who had not thrown from windows every description of missile at him! Now he saw them gathered, with what intention he knew not; but as they gazed at him he returned their gaze full measure, and sent out a deep, hollow challenge as if inviting them to personal combat and a settlement of long account.

"Oh, that's you, is it?" yelled the little man. "That's the critter I've heard tell of, is it? That's what old Simon leaves me in place of two months' good rent, eh? Well, I'll have the rent out of the old miser yet! I'll let him know I'm as sharp as he is, if I have to go to law for it! And, meantime, you'll keep me out o' my property, eh? Fine doin's! A little joke, eh? Let's see about it! Come on!" he commanded his big retainer; and, in spite of the fury in his voice and gesture, he began with coolness, his hands in his pockets, to walk along

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the narrow sidewalk leading to the cottage.

The big driver wagged his head and lurched after him, repeating defiantly:

"What any man darst, I darst!"

There was a general shout from those gathered at the corner:

"Come back!"

"Don't you risk it!"

The red-headed man turned around.

"And do you think," he asked, in a tone of contempt, "that I'm afraid of a *dog*?"

Gus Schaftsmire and some others reddened a little; and after this those on the corner were silent.

The little man walked on step by step, his hands in his pockets, apostrophizing John Frenchy with every breath:

"You uncivil cur, you! You'll keep folks waitin' 'round all day, will you? Well, you'll go to the devil, — or else I will! One of us two!"

John Frenchy saw an open and determined enemy, and he stood waiting, his big head

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raised, his lips lifted, a low gurgle in his throat, and he slightly shook all over with excitement.

The man had approached within a few paces of him now, and raised his voice; he began to shout more violently. John Frenchy took a step forward, he lifted one paw, and stood with it raised; he stood taut now, his lips baring his teeth, the gurgle changed into a snarl.

He was waiting for the man to touch the gate.

Some one at the corner gave an irrepressible cry of warning. Still the man came on. He kept his hands in his pockets, but he thrust his head forward menacingly.

"Do you think I'm afraid of you?" he asked, face to face with John Frenchy now, and he took another step. His coat brushed the gate. It was the signal.

John Frenchy partly closed his eyes for the half-second it took him to throw back his head and give out one terrific roar. Then he rose on his hind legs and leaped high.

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But not at the gate, not forward; he sank in his tracks.

Something had happened, — something like magic, like lightning from heaven!

"I'm not afraid of you!" the man had roared. "That for yours!" He had slipped his right hand from his pocket; there was a flash, a report, and the great leaping body fell.

There was silence for a moment, then those on the corner gave a shout, and the little man reached over with a flourish and deliberately threw the gate wide open.

He thought he had killed John Frenchy; but he had not.

John Frenchy lay still on his side; a burning, fiery pain gripped his shoulder and tingled through his whole body, and he could smell his own blood as it came welling up and trickled over his coarse hair on to the path. A dizziness and a blindness had come over him. But through it all, under it all, he knew that he was beaten. He knew that he would never protect that gate for his mas-

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ter, or his master's property again. The man had won! And, deep down in his being, the fierce pride which had held itself so high, was lowered; it lay maimed and wounded, just as John Frenchy's great body lay maimed and wounded on the little path.

And just at that moment there came another shout from the corner; and here came the Partlettsville people crowding along the sidewalk, stepping where and how they chose, as they had never done before. And at the same moment the man entered the gate, came up the path — and stopped.

John Frenchy had heard the shout, he had heard the approaching feet; he seemed already to feel his enemies around him looking at him in his humiliation and defeat. He rose with a growl and a fierce snarl, gnashing his teeth with pain and fury, blood and foam gathering on his lips. He would take his anguish away from the sight of man! If he must die, he would die alone!

Great hulk though he was, he had always been quick on his feet, and he had risen with

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such a desperate swiftness that the man had no time to cover him with his pistol before the great beast, lunging past him, had staggered through the gate.

The Partlettsville people sprang back.

But Gus Schaftsmire, seeing that retreating back and the staggering legs, felt his animosity arise within him. He had a stick in his hand, and he reached out with it and dealt the dog a blow on his hind quarters. He had scarcely done it, however, before his face turned pale. Fear seized him. Once before he had been too rash! And he sprang across the pavement and caught the fence rail, ready for a leap.

But John Frenchy was far beyond retaliation. His great head was sagging; it lolled slightly from side to side with the desperate effort he made to draw his heavy paws after him. Slowly, slowly he went, leaving a trail of blood in the snow which had now covered the ground with its fine white mantle.

Those behind sprang into the little yard, roamed about curiously, displaced the great

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hogshead and kicked it rolling ignominiously into the road, talked over the adventure and stood about, watching the driver unpack the furniture.

Then the energetic little red-headed man shouted:

"Say — come and lend a hand! Help us in with this stuff, can't you? It's comin' on to snow, an' gettin' dark already!"

But suddenly the Partlettsville people all remembered that they had to go home. To "lend a hand" was not much in their line.

Late that night a lantern could be seen glimmering along the side of the hill toward Partlettsville. It was carried by Gus Schaftsmire, he, Michaelson and others having gone out, "to track the beast and finish him, it bein' unsafe to leave a creature like that, half-mad and wounded, hangin' round."

Through the white snow they could track him readily enough, not only by the great paw marks, but by the blood stains at regular intervals marking the way.

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"An' here he must have thought he was about done for!" exclaimed Gus, pointing to a little well of blood in the snow. Evidently the dog had paused here, and perhaps lain down.

They tracked him straight to the little stream; and there the trail ceased.

They crossed on the stepping-stones and examined the opposite side, but, though they thought they saw a few paw marks, the blood stains ceased. Whether the icy water had staunched the flow of blood, or whether he was hanging about somewhere under the shadow of the bank, they could not guess. At any rate, it was bitter cold; the wind, which had been rising all day, was now raging, and the snow, which had held up for a few hours, was again falling. It was going to be a night of it; they had made a brave search, and thought they had best go home.

"Most like," remarked Michaelson, as he set his face doggedly to meet the rising gale, "most like this cold'll finish him anyhow."

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At just about the same hour a dark, lonely form could be seen working its way slowly, painfully, toward the brow of the hill. Up through the thick, bare bushes, pausing, panting, groaning.

Now the brow of the hill was gained, now the fir trees, now the big pine and the little one. Then a turn, and just beyond a light gleamed. Toward this the lonely form struggled, nearer and nearer. At last it reached it, stood before the window from which it streamed, and then, suddenly, with a frantic effort, reared itself, and stood so for an instant, its head revealed in the square of light; a great head, earless, bloody, from which hung ice and frozen mud, and at the same moment an animal cry went up; a cry of torture, humiliation, bitterness and appeal.

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CHAPTER IX

A PLAN IS FRUSTRATED

Every one in Partlettsville wondered what had become of John Frenchy. The storm proved to be a severe one. It lasted two days, and when it was over everything was covered deep with snow. Some thought he must be buried under a drift, but Gus Schaftsmire and his companions believed that he had died in the little stream, and that his great body was lying in some deep hollow under its now frozen surface.

However it might be, it was not more than a nine days' wonder, scarcely that, and they soon turned themselves to other affairs.

Mr. Carruthers, at this time, set his thoughts upon the task of getting Jim from Witch Beevish. He had a real, almost instinctive dislike for the old woman, which

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he conscientiously tried to smother, but his disapproval of her he felt to be justifiable.

When she came to Partlettsville some years before, got her bit of a house, and made her garden, he, in the regular order of things, had called on her, though she had not entered his church. From the first, on account of her strange ways, she was ridiculed by the Partlettsville people, who openly proclaimed her to be crazy.

Her reception of the minister was neither cordial, nor markedly respectful.

"Madam," he said, at the close of a not very satisfying interview, "it is a regret to me that you do not worship."

"And why," she asked, with a quick flash in her eyes, "do you assume that I do not worship?"

He replied gravely and emphatically: "I *must* assume as much; you have never come to the church!"

"And do you," she cried out suddenly, "imagine that it is necessary to sit between four walls in order to worship! Look!" she

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cried, pointing him to the window; "what is that above you? Heaven! And what is that beneath? Earth! Why not stand upon this, and look up at that? Look at what is about you, the trees, the flowers, the birds; — they are speaking to you! But you," she exclaimed with increasing excitement, "must feel that before you can worship you must shut yourself into a church with painted windows, and stand in a box you call a pulpit!"

"Madam!" exclaimed the minister.

"Look about you, man!" she cried. "Broaden your vision! What you see and feel may be true enough, but *see more, feel more!* And help others to see and feel!"

Henry Carruthers stood still, his slender shoulders thrown back, and as he looked down at her there was a flash in his dark eyes that matched the light in hers.

"You tell me to broaden my vision," he said, his firm lips tightly drawn. "Let me ask you in turn, is *your* vision so narrow that it sees not the church in its dignity and

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great power? In the righteousness and truth in which it has stood through the years? The church of God!" he went on, his voice rising, "the haven of those who love her; but the scourge and punishment of those who dare to revile her!"

The old woman took a step nearer and touched his sleeve.

"Down there in that church," she said, pointing toward Partlettsville, "you cherish the belief that there is no one outside of it who is good enough to be treated as a human being, no one who has a right to live on God's earth in his own way. I read that belief in your eyes, I read it in the faces of those people down there! Because I hear the Spirit of Truth in a thousand voices, under the open heaven, and do not enter your four walls to seek it, you would make of me an outcast! Until you admit my worship to be a true worship, I will never admit yours!"

They parted in anger. It could scarcely be otherwise. Henry Carruthers was angry, but he was wounded, too. He was accus-

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tomed to be treated with the greatest respect as the representative of the church, executing its mission, bearing its burden, — which he did indeed, ever conscientiously, to the very limit of his endurance. Now, the Witch's behavior seemed to insult him, not so much as a man, but as a minister, and that thought was like a poison. After this he could scarcely think of her without a quickening of the pulse, and when tales of her were repeated to him, his face always became rigid. Restraining himself, he said little; but the expression of his face was easily read by those about him, and:

"Mr. Carruthers, hisself, ain't got no use for her!" was a very damning comment upon the Witch.

Now, it happened that Kitty Merryweather no longer did a day's work for Witch Beevish.

Down in Partlettsville Kitty said that the way was too long in the middle of Winter. But the truth was, very high words had

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passed between them over Kitty's Willie, to whom the Witch had applied terms of the most uncomplimentary nature. Kitty thereupon declared that as long as the sun shone in heaven, she would never do another day's work for her. The Witch made answer that she didn't wish her to! The door had slammed, and Kitty gone down the hill for the last time. And all the while little Jim sat screwed up on the bench beside the kitchen stove, with eyes as big as saucers, most uncomfortably conscious of the fact that he was the bone of contention.

As for Kitty, her very tenderest spot was touched. Her Willie was the light of her eyes. Maggie, — well, she had her faults, she wouldn't deny! But Willie! She saw him in the light of such an extreme partiality that her laudations of him were oft-times so far drawn that the neighbors had much ado to keep straight faces. Whatever was pure, lovely, and of good report, appertained to Willie. And even if a thing were reprehensible in itself, the moment Willie

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did it, it became right. Facts were ignored. Willie was brave, handsome, manly, the future hope of the family. And certainly he was the only creature in the world against whom she never exercised her tongue.

It can be imagined then that she carried an angry heart away from Partletts'.

Kitty was not one to keep her feelings to herself; she could never be accused of pining in thought. She desired a vent for her indignation and found it in railing at the Witch. She had always had wonderful stories to tell of the old woman, but now they became thrice wonderful, and the awful things Witch Beevish said and did were recounted daily to an audience that found almost its only diversion in listening with country credulity to gossip and tales.

She had secretly been irritated at seeing Jim snug and made much of; and his word being taken against her Willie was a thing past human endurance! "Huh!" she would say to herself, snapping her eyes, and tossing up her head.

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She formed a plan which was beautifully simple. It was just this: Steal Jim from the Witch! The minister disapproved her having him; and if once he could be securely laid hold of, it would save Mr. Carruthers a sight of trouble.

There were those who quite agreed with her, especially as the thing might be done easily. True, it was seldom that the Witch ever disturbed the dust of Partlettsville; she was known to do all her trading at Abbottsville, a town two miles on the other side of the hill of Partletts'; — for she accused the Schaftsmires of dishonesty, the grocer also was a cheat in her estimation, Louisa Myers she distrusted. "Seems like we ain't good enough for her, no way we fix it!" the tradespeople all declared, and loved her accordingly. It was true that, as they "fixed it," they were generally disobliging, and by no means generally honest. But such little foibles should be charitably overlooked!

She did, however, occasionally drive through Partlettsville, and, as we have seen,

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sometimes left her carriage. Such an occasion was to be watched for; some one was to engage her in talk; "rile her up;" then Kitty's Willie, who was strong and well able to execute a manœuvre behind other people's backs, would snatch little Jim from the carriage, — he would be scurried off by those waiting to assist in the adventure; and vivid pictures were drawn of the Witch's futile rage, and much loud laughter went into the making of the plan.

Accordingly, one bright morning, about six weeks after the big storm, when Witch Beevish's equipage was to be seen slowly sidling down the incline of Partletts', word went round, and there was great eagerness, and a quick gathering of those who were to be ringleaders, and a still larger gathering of those who were to be audience.

"She's comin'!" was whispered, and the admonition given: "Don't look too interested!"

Groups of Partlettsvillites lounged along, pretending to be intent upon nothing, but

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secretly nudging each other. It was exciting and exhilarating; and the Witch came on!

She came on, turned the corner into the high street, and she and her equipage stood out in full view. Surreptitious glances were taken. There was Jim just as had been hoped, sitting beside her on the front seat. But what was this, stalking behind the carriage? Partlettsville looked and gasped.

The great, hairy creature, in form as big as a calf, was familiar — too familiar to their eyes. Familiar that enormous head, slightly lowered, surrounded by the ruff of coarse hair; familiar that scowling forehead, the fierce eyes, and lips a trifle parted.

The strangeness, the unexpectedness of it struck them dumb. The spokesman, who was to "rile" up the Witch, was silent; the audience melted; and Willie, the bold kidnapper, came not forth.

Meantime the strange procession passed on up the street, the old horse limping leisurely, the Witch in her striped robe, with little Jim seated securely beside her; and,

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pawing slowly after, John, — John Frenchy no longer, but John o' Partletts', hideous, huge, with a certain gaunt majesty of his own, and with a pride revived and whole. A dog with an abiding-place, a new trust, and a friend.

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CHAPTER X

A LIGHT GOES OUT IN THE VALLEY

Mr. Carruthers had long proposed to himself to take up the affair of Jim definitely.

But this Winter much slipped past him which he had purposed to do. The truth was he worked with a divided heart. Strive as he would, draw himself together as he would, he often found himself distrait. And old Elsa, watching him, would shake her head.

"The Maister can no blind himself longer," she thought. "The thing's become too plain for mortal eye to pass over."

What Elsa saw, the Carruthers children felt with the quick sensitiveness of repressed, responsible children, and gravely went about with a certain sad meaning in their looks. Even the brightness of little Margy's humor seemed dimmed. In the midst of laughter she would stop, put her hand on Elsa's face,

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and look inquiringly into the old woman's deep-set eyes.

The neighbors, too, shook their heads when they passed the rectory; and on Sunday mornings glanced at the pastor's pew to see if his little lady were able to be out.

For every one loved Evelyn Carruthers. She was one of those rare beings who can pass through life in even a small, censorious community without giving offence. Very gentle, very quiet, keeping to herself, and dutifully tending her own affairs, which were multitudinous; giving assistance, but seldom advice; rather timid, but capable and tender in her own home, she offered little opportunity for criticism, even from the most carping. There were perhaps two or three who, on occasion, remarked that: "'Twas a pity the parson had not a more forcible wife! A man in his position needed a woman who could take a stand!" Be that as it may, Evelyn Carruthers did the best she could, and if limitations she had, they were those of nature, not of will.

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Indeed, she had done the best she could for so long that now a great weariness was coming over her. She grew paler and frailer each day, but she kept herself ever at her post, ever at her round of ceaseless and pressing duties. For, in her life, duty had so long been the watchword that to care for, or save herself, would have seemed to her a self-indulgence.

Her husband at first refused to see the signs that others saw; he felt that this blow could not fall on him. Strong, self-reliant man though he was, he unconsciously evaded the bitter truth, until at last the time came when he could evade it no longer.

The time came when she could no longer tend her duties. And then the dreadful day came when she did not rise from her bed. She was ill; the fact had to be acknowledged. The house became quiet. And then the children could no longer go and come in their mother's room. And after that, having once laid down the burden of care and responsibility, she sank so rapidly that even those

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who had watched her closely were surprised.

"It's no long she'll be here now!" Elsa said to herself in the silent kitchen. "No long!"

And no long it was.

Winter had slipped by. Skies were tinged with the pink and promise of Spring, snows were melting everywhere, little streams running, and over on the south side of the hill of Partletts' the first snowdrops were shaking their delicate white cups in the chill breeze, and here and there a forward violet could be seen pushing up through the leaves to open a brave blue eye upon a rather inhospitable world.

Just at this time, when the days were a bit longer and brighter, Evelyn Carruthers' dark eyes closed. She had brought eight lives into the world, with the coming of a ninth, her own life — which had always been much like a frail, but clear and cheerful light — was quenched. There was a faint cry

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and then a very deep stillness. Her baby breathed but once, and died with her.

The children, accustomed to self-control, quietly did old Elsa's bidding; and grave as grown people, they made no demonstration of the pain that wrung their hearts all the more deeply because it must be smothered. All their lives they had been accustomed to a father's discipline, but they had also been accustomed to a mother's love. And now, what were they to do without the love?

Only little Margy lifted her voice in loud weeping, voicing the dreadful ache, and would not be comforted.

And the tall, grave man sat in his study, his head in his hands, his lips set. No one came to him, no one dared speak to him; he wished no one to speak to him. He had always stood alone, his rigid gravity setting a wall around him. Only to her had his nature gone out; only to her had he ever spoken as from heart to heart. And now a

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terrible loneliness, a fearful void seemed to open within him and all about him. Alone, in the relentless presence of death, the darkness and mystery!

But no! Life with its responsibilities, its hundred duties, was calling! He had no right to loiter, scarcely to pause, over a personal grief. Already personal feeling had stood between him and his work. For this last Winter he had been but a half-hearted laborer. Conscience spoke with a harsh voice. He closed his teeth: "Though He slay me!" he murmured; crushed back the questioning, the tears and pain, and rose, pale, not to bow before his grief again.

No one ever saw him shed a tear. He conducted the services himself over his wife without a tremor in his voice, without a softened glance or touch of emotion, like a man of iron. His congregation were dumb; and his children wiped their eyes furtively, as if they were committing a crime.

Upon the hill of Partletts' an old woman stood as the bells tolled. She had plucked

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a few early snowdrops and violets; and if the little darkey boy and great dog who stood beside her had looked into her eyes they would have seen them to be dim.

As the bells tolled, she stretched out her hand and threw the flowers toward the valley, as if for a token, and the dimness of her eyes cleared as they brightened and took fire.

"Had you given her more of these, Henry Carruthers, and less of that same doleful tolling, you might have had her with you longer," she murmured.

She stood still, looking down into the valley.

The dreary toll of the bells, and the running of the stream around Partlettsville were the only sound that came to her. The bare little town lay outspread in the pale sunshine, and at the far end she saw the church, with its door standing open, and beyond, in the graveyard, a heap of soil thrown up beside an open grave.

She recalled how once the parson's little

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lady had found her way up to Partletts', and she seemed to see her bright hair, and hear her pleased voice exclaiming: "Oh — but this *is* a garden!"

"Poor girl!" she murmured, with full eyes. "Poor girl!" For, to the old woman, she who had died down in the valley at the age of thirty-five seemed in reality but a girl indeed.

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"BROUGHT HER CHAIR OUT ON HER LITTLE PIAZZA AND SAT THERE ROCKING AND GOSSIPING."

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CHAPTER XI

SPRING

In Partlettsville the daisies were opening and the hardy honeysuckle was throwing out its long, irregular flowers. The clover was green and the lilacs were budding. Along the high street storm doors were taken down, and in Louisa Myers' shop-window mufflers and mittens gave place to a string of white cotton gloves and some very red paper kites. Kitty Merryweather, in the late afternoon, brought her chair out on her little piazza and sat there rocking and gossiping. Rows of ducks waddled cheerfully in the puddles along the high street, and boys sat on fence palings exchanging cat-calls and whistles.

Partlettsville was at its cheerfullest; talk and gossip went round, and, as is usual in the Spring, when the ground is opened and

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planting begins, there was a good bit to talk about.

Much of the talk, however, centred about the hill of Partletts' and the old Witch. That person, ever aggressive when her sacred domain of Partletts' was encroached upon, had been aggravating her neighbors on this side of the hill by preventing them from having what they regarded as their rights, and assuming authority where she, on her side, most certainly had no right to do so.

It has been told how Michaelson stole forth at night to cut what wood he wanted, in order, as he would say, to avoid a "talkin' match with the Witch!" But there were others, too, who went up the hill and felled a tree when they liked, and, being of bolder metal, went in the daytime and turned a deaf ear to the Witch's "jawin'." These had, more than once, carried out their design with triumph.

There were those, too, who, in the Spring, went up to Partletts' with game-bag and gun, and returned with more than one fine brace

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of rabbits. And this was also one of the Witch's pet aversions. She would rush out in her red headdress, following the men through the wood, ordering them off "her property," and asking how they dared come here.

"In Winter there's not one of you would put your foot to climb this hill! Let Spring come, and easy walking, and here you are with your axes and your guns, to shoot the creatures, and cut the trees!"

Sometimes the men mocked; sometimes they paid no attention. In any case they did as they pleased, killed what they wanted and went away.

But this Spring all this was changed!

Michaelson, cutting a tree one night on the lower side of Partletts', suddenly heard a whistle, then a rush; the next moment a pair of eyes were glaring at him through the darkness and a voice cried: "Go! as fast as you can, or my dog will kill you!" And he went.

So it was at all times. Nothing could stir on that hill but what, crashing through the

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underbrush, would come a great form; following would appear a red headdress, and, in the rear, a little black face, eyes rolling in wonder and excitement.

Not a tree was felled, not a rabbit shot on Partletts' this Spring; and great and vehement was the anger accordingly.

The Witch meantime was most triumphant. She loved to accomplish her will by force of arms. To say to her enemies: "Do this!" and see it done. In John o' Partletts' she had such an ally as she had scarcely dreamed of, and he proved so remarkably intelligent that he understood every word she spoke to him. She had but to motion the great beast and her will was done as if she had been an army with banners. For the first time she was supreme ruler of her domain!

But in Partlettsville there was more and more anger and much talk of shooting the big beast; but this was not so easily come at. As Gus Schaftsmire said:

"Them three travels in a trio! If you

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winged one you'd most likely wing the wrong one. And she does it on purpose — the cunnin' old fox!"

In this way a real feud sprang up between the Witch and the Partlettsvillites; it was bitter on both sides, and many the threats that were uttered.

The Witch never came into Partlettsville now, not through fear, — she being one who feared not the dust of battle, — but to prove her contempt and scorn. When she went abroad, it was to Abbottsville, with her old horse and her two retainers, to get her supplies. She always locked up her tiny cottage carefully, fastened all the shutters, and adjusted what she called her "trap," an arrangement by which, if any one should break into her front door, a well balanced flat-iron would fall on his head. The old woman had a childlike faith in the most simple and primitive arrangements, and this invention gave her a most wonderful sense of security.

More than once she met some of her enemies upon the road, who threatened to go up

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to Partletts' and "raise the roof" in her absence.

"And if you do," she cried back, "remember this — something awful will happen to you! I have warned you!"

She was thinking of the flat-iron; but she threw such a dramatic horror into her voice that she made them think of witches, conjurations and spells.

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CHAPTER XII

THE LOSING OF JIM

One warm, showery afternoon toward midsummer Gus Schaftsmire was driving along a side road near Abbottsville when he saw, passing along the Abbottsville turnpike, the old Witch in her carriage, with the great dog following — and Jim was not with them!

He drew up, waited until she was out of sight, then, gaining the turnpike himself, whipped up his horse and came galloping into Partlettsville.

He jumped out of his wagon and threw the reins over the horse's neck.

"Come on!" he cried out to Michaelson, who chanced to be passing along the sidewalk. "I'm goin' up yonder to get the little nigger!"

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Old Schaftsmire came running out of the shop in his shirt sleeves and stained butcher's apron.

"No, you ain't!" he shouted. "You're goin' to stay right here an' help me unload this wagon!"

"Think so?" cried Gus with a grin. "Look to it yourself then!" And he sprang round on the other side of the horse. For he was a most unfilial son; the old man had a hot temper, and not infrequently he and Gussie came to violent fisticuffs.

"John Frenchy," continued Gus triumphantly, "is on the road to Abbottsville with his dear, his best beloved Missis, an' the little black one is up there by his lonesome. Come on — it's the chanct! An' there ain't no time to stand considerin', neither, because, slow as she goes with that old cripple of hers, I had to be slower still gittin' back, on account of my load!"

"Slow!" cried out his father. "It looks like it, don't it?" pointing to the lathered animal in the shafts. "An' if you'd found-

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ered my horse for one o' your danged tricks — "

"Never mind him," Gussie interrupted, jerking his head toward his father. "Let him jaw to hisself! You run as I tell you, git some fellers together, — an' a' axe, an' a crowbar!" And he dodged past his father into the shop, out again, and up the street with an energy and quickness that would have pleased the old man much could he have seen it applied to business.

An enthusiastic group gathered; Willie Merryweather foremost among them.

"Is you sure you see the dog, Gus?" he rigorously inquired.

"Yes," replied Gus, who was in high, facetious humor, "jiggin' along the road to Abbottsville. He won't be back for an hour to come. So forward's the cry an' call!"

Forthwith the procession moved upon Partletts', the axe and crowbar appearing according to Gus's martial directions.

There was a flutter along the high street, windows were opened, questions asked:

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"Say!" shouted some wit, "where yo' goin'? To hunt wild Injuns?"

"No!" yelled back Gussie. "Tame African hunt!" Which repartee brought down a shout of laughter.

Old Schaftsmire stood in the street, his wagon to unload, much disgruntled, and vigorously admonishing his son to: "Leave the old crone alone, and tend to his own business!"

Soon the party was out of sight, lost in the leafy shade of Partletts'. They sprang up the side of the hill. The little brook ran by them, clear, over large round stones; and behind lay Partlettsville baked and bare, the old willows drooping in the heat and covered with dust. But above all was fresh and cool. A breeze that swept the hill-top kept everything in motion, and the sunshine made a hundred changing patterns as it flickered over the shaded, grey trunks of the beech trees.

Now they reached the big pine and the little one, and plunged down on the other

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side. Partlettsville was out of sight in an instant; and then suddenly through a break in the trees the Witch's cottage and garden appeared.

The garden was full of flowers. It lay with the afternoon sun upon it, just as when Jim had first seen it, only now it was in its mid-summer glory, — and, how carefully laid out, how perfectly planned so that each plant should receive the right amount of shade, the right amount of sunshine, only the old Witch knew, and its own perfectly successful beauty testified. The verbenas were in full bloom, two splendid beds of pink, purple, white and crimson. In the very centre rose the Witch's August lilies, swaying delicately on their graceful stems, and flanking them on either side, a glorious patch of salvia.

It was no wonder that the parson's little lady had exclaimed: "This *is* a garden!"

But Gus and his followers paused neither to observe nor admire. They jumped over the flower beds and surrounded the tiny cottage, calling to each other, and examining

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doors and windows. Everything down-stairs was securely fastened, but it was a warm day, and one of the upper windows stood open. They had scarcely perceived this before what should appear, framed in it, but a little black, terrified face!

There was a shout.

"We've got him! We've got him!"

Little Jim's heart must have stood quite still at the cry.

Then there were demands for a ladder. One was found, set up, and Gus and Willie Merryweather were mounting in a flash.

Poor Jim had nowhere to hide; in the tiny cottage there was no such thing as a closet — so he ran behind a bed, hugged the post in both his arms, and as his enemies appeared in the room, cried out with all his might:

"I ain't a gwine! Leaf me be! I tells yo' I ain't a gwine!"

And if anything could have added to Willie Merryweather's delight in the whole adventure, it was this scene.

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He began to rock about the room, doubled over with laughter.

"Oh, Gus," he cried, mimicking the little darkey's voice, "what we gwine do now? 'Cause he says he ain't a gwine! He ain't a gwine!"

Gus gave vent to one irrepressible guffaw, then he settled to business.

"Funny, eh?" he exclaimed, eying Willie sarcastically. "Not so funny, though, if the old woman gits back before we're clean out o' this here! Here, sonny!" to Jim. "Turn loose! We ain't goin' to take the bed-post —it's you we want!"

And Gus, accustomed daily to shouldering whole beeves and muttons, made nothing of dislodging Jim from his abiding-place and hoisting him over his shoulder.

Those below held the ladder steady, while Willie, from above, held Jim's hands to prevent him from seizing the window-ledge, which he had a tendency desperately to do while explaining:

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"I b'longs 'long o' Mis' Beevish! I don't b'longs 'long o' you!"

Once on the ground, there was self-congratulation, — the thing having been done so quickly and easily that they were surprised themselves. But there was no time to loiter. Once upon solid ground, Gus's vein of humor came uppermost once more.

"Stop your clackin' now!" he remarked to Jim. "You don't really want to stop here, you know. You only *think* you do, an' that's along o' bein' bewitched! What you really want is to come along o' us! So just get that before your mind, an' it'll save you a lot o' uneasiness."

Jim could not see it in this light, and finding his face set toward Partlettsville, and himself forcibly conducted in that detested direction, he began to cry out and draw back.

"I tells yo' I ain't a gwine!" he reiterated helplessly, in the face of "gwine" as fast as his captors could haul him along. "Leaf me be, I tells yo'!" And he caught hold of the corner of the house, the tree

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trunks, and even the twigs and branches, to hold himself back.

To no avail. He was hurried, scurried, scampered down the hill.

When they came to the very last slope they scampered down so swiftly, and with so much loud laughter, that they looked like an hilarious picnic party returning from a successful outing.

The only sober member was little Jim. He was very sober indeed. He had given up crying; it did no good, and, besides, he was too frightened. He just felt himself rushed along, helpless and abandoned to his fate.

And so they scampered into Partlettsville. It was almost dark, it having been late when they started out. And immediately the question arose as to what would be done with Jim.

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CHAPTER XIII

JIM PROVES A PROBLEM

As they rounded the corner that led into the high street some one chanced to glance behind.

"Look!" was the cry.

High up on the ridge of Partletts' a lantern was to be seen waving. It was already so dark up there among the trees that they could see no figure; but there was not a doubt that any one standing on that height could see them plainly as they rushed in a group over the bare little sidewalk.

"It's a signal! She's wavin' us back!" some one cried.

"Already!" gasped Gus. "I ain't thought she'd had time to get back so quick! See here, — she'll be down on us! She ain't goin' to stand there wavin' no lantern! She'll be comin' on!"

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"She's comin' on now!" shouted some one.

And, sure enough, the light had begun to descend. It even seemed, in the stillness of the gathering dusk, that they could hear a crashing movement among the twigs and underbrush high above them. The sound was but too suggestive.

"Come on! Come a-runnin'!"

Gus Schaftsmire began to pant. Willie Merryweather's face, losing the bright red of pleasurable triumph, became pale. Hangers on, who had hastened to join the party when it came picnic fashion down the hill, melted away.

"We must git him into a house — an' ourselves into a house!" cried Michaelson.

But into what house?

Kitty Merryweather's was the nearest, and into it they bundled Jim, Willie throwing open the door with a kick.

Kitty ran out into the hall, a lamp in her hand, a broad grin on her face.

"Well, if you ain't got him!" she ex-

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claimed admiringly. "I says to myself when I hears Willie was gone up with them, — I says to myself: 'If darin'ness 'll fetch him, they'll 'ave him back within the hour!'"

But her son did not look as pleased as might be expected at these laudations.

"Yes," he replied, making toward the shelter of the inner room. "We've got him. But she's after us already. Makin' down the hill, an' her dog with her, not a doubt!"

"Then why, in the name o' gracious, 'ave you brought him in here?" asked Kitty, pointing at Jim. "Ain't you know the old woman hates me? An' you too, Willie? Ain't we the first people she's goin' to suspicion? I won't 'ave her comin' here with that beast! Gus Schaftsmire, take 'im out o' this — take 'im to your own 'ouse! An' Willie! come in the kitchen; I won't 'ave you out in the street when there's danger!"

Willie was about to avail himself of this invitation, but before he could do so found himself bundled out upon the door-step. Gus

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had no idea of being deserted by his supporters.

Again the question faced them; — where to take Jim?

Michaelson's? Too far!

Schaftsmire's? "The old man's as mad as a hornet with me!" declared Gus, wiping his brow.

The minister's? But did they really dare make a scene at the minister's? Besides, the way there lay in open view of the hill.

"Deacon Sawrey's?" said some one.

The deacon's house was near, and he hated the old Witch, having once had an altercation with her. No better place could be thought of; and there was no time to think long!

They scurried Jim across the road and up a by-street. The house was one of the better class in Partlettsville; it stood back in quite a plot of ground, and had lace curtains at all the windows.

Deacon Sawrey himself appeared at the door. He was a pompous man, with pink

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cheeks and large whiskers. The moment he saw the group at his door he put both hands in his pockets and began jingling his money quite desperately — not with the idea of giving any of it away, because that he was seldom known to do, but out of amazement and concern.

"Why — why, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

It was quite awkward, now that they were face to face with the deacon, to say what they had come for. Time pressed, however, and Gus explained that they had brought Jim down from Partletts'. Mr. Carruthers would approve, he knew. They wanted to put him in some safe place over-night. Would the deacon take charge of him till morning? He very politely did not mention that the Witch and her dog were already coming down the hill.

Mrs. Sawrey, who had been listening, came forward.

"No — no!" she cried emphatically. "You cannot bring him in here! Look at

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their boots, all covered with mud!" she added.

"Yes, ma'am, but we got to put him somewheres!" exclaimed Gus desperately.

The deacon began again distractedly rattling his money: "Why — what's that to us!" he began.

"Not here!" declared Mrs. Sawrey. "Never! I never allow strange children in my house! My Evey's too delicate! Take him away!"

At this moment a plump little girl peeped from the parlor door, and her mother instantly cried out and waved her hands.

"Go back! go back, Evey!" she exclaimed, then waving in turn to Gus: "You must go away! Take him away, I tell you!"

At the same moment Deacon Sawrey ceased to rattle his money and slammed the door.

Some one ran to the end of the piazza and looked toward Partletts'. The light on the hillside had disappeared.

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"She's down in the town, then!" decided Gus.

"Oh, Lord," cried Willie beginning to whimper, "she'll be on us in a minute!"

"Shut up!" retorted the other. "It'll take her ten minutes to walk along the main street."

"An' what's to hinder her dog from runnin' ahead?" was suggested.

Willie writhed. His knees began to give way.

"Oh, come on!" he cried. "Leave him here!" indicating Jim. "Drop him! I ain't willin' to be tore to pieces for him!"

Others, too, in imagination, began to feel a hot breath and to see a pair of glaring eyes.

But Gus's fighting blood was up. He was afraid of the dog, but, on the other hand, he hated the old woman. She had stood between him and his sport all summer, and the wish for revenge was potent.

"No, you don't!" he shouted, barring the way to the steps. "If we give in to her this time, she'll think she owns Partlettsville!

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She ain't goin' to overreach me so easy! Git together, an' heave him round into the barn!"

"'Tain't possible!" exclaimed the mutineers. "It's too fur!"

In this extremity, peering out desperately into the dark, some one spied the dim outline of a small building near at hand.

"The deacon's old hen-house! Put him in there! It's the only place now!"

They jostled Jim down the steps, across the stretch of yard, and fairly flung him — more dead than alive through fright — into the little shanty.

None too soon! — Nay, not soon enough! For between the fence railing at the corner a great bounding form was seen coming on, pausing, and coming on again. And they could hear the sound of heavy paws padding swiftly.

"He's on us!" admitted Gus. And forcibly grabbing Willie Merryweather and one or two others who had not their wits about them he flung them into the hen-house after

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Jim. Then he rushed in himself. It was a rickety little hut, long fallen into disuse, and the door swung wide on rusty hinges. He caught at the door, worked, jerked, finally slammed it, and, at the very instant, a dark form cleared the little gate that opened upon the grass plot, and came, at a long, sweeping lope, to the place of hiding. For the wild dog's scent had never failed him yet; and all his savage blood was up! With a noise in his throat like rising thunder, he rose on his hind legs and brought his weight against the rotten old door. Those behind who held it felt the whole fabric shake. Then he threw back his head and gave a cry, hoarse, deep, with a note of triumph in it.

It was a signal to one who followed swiftly, a lantern held high in her trembling hand, her grey hair dishevelled and straggling about her face, while that old face was distorted by an expression both of rage and pain, and she muttered over and over:

"My child! They have taken him! Where have they put my child?"

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE RETURN OF JIM

The old Witch came across the grass plot, reached the hen-house and swung her lantern at it; at the same moment the dog, leaping up, crashed against the door again.

"Give me my child!" she cried. "If you have him there, give him to me! You cowards — to steal a helpless child, who fears you! And you think I am a defenceless old woman!"

There was a pause, then suddenly a stone came crashing in at one of the windows, and again the dog's ponderous weight shook the door.

Those on the inside began to feel hard-pressed. The door was furnished with neither bolt nor lock, and though they were able to hold it against the dog, they feared each time he threw himself upon it that the

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hinge would give way, or that it would fly in pieces, being so shaky and rotten.

"Jim, Jim!" went on the hoarse old voice. "Answer me, child — I've come to get you! These wicked people shall not — never shall have you! Tell me you're there, Jim! John man is with me, and he'll fight for you; — he knows these people! The cowards! At them, John man!"

And again the lantern clashed, and the door shook and trembled in every joint.

Gus Schaftsmire passed his arm over his dripping forehead, as he stood, his broad back braced against the door, and he gave a semblance of a grin, though his face was pale.

"What I'd give to be out o' this!" he remarked.

And though he spoke in a whisper, there was a sound from without that made it known his voice was recognized. A gurgle and a snarl answered him, and a hot, impatient sniffing and the patter of paws feeling at the threshold.

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"Curse you!" cried the youth, in real fear. And again John o' Partletts' heard, and responded more forcibly, for he came plunging at the trembling boards that divided him from his enemy.

If any human being could roll into the form of a hedgehog, that human being was Willie Merryweather at this moment. Doubled into a ball, he lay off at one side of the hen-house, his back to the others, given over to fear, and pretending to be dead or near it. Another youth stood over Jim, ready to clap his hand over his mouth the moment he made the least outcry. And Jim stood listening to his friends outside, his heart beating in his throat. To be with them spelled friendship and freedom, while to remain with his captors meant terror and misery. The running and shouting, the loud wrangling, and the pulling and jerking, together with the fact of finding himself again in Partlettsville, had quite thrown him into despair; his senses seemed dazed for the time, and he began clasping his hands and mumbling to

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himself, pausing when he heard his friend's voice calling his name, to listen with an expression of timid hopefulness.

And now some one picked up the stone which the old Witch had thrown, and, springing up to the broken window and taking a hurried aim, "gave it to her!" It struck against the tin of the lantern and bounded off. It was followed by a billet of wood; this was aimed more carefully and it struck her over the forehead. She put her hand to her head and turned aside.

"Done for! Done for!" an immediate shout went up — followed by the ready advice: "You'd best go home, old woman!"

But the shout died. She turned, waving her bent lantern, and in a voice now broken by pain and rage, called to the dog. And the great beast, who had seen and understood, plunged at the door as he had never plunged before. The thin inch boards rattled, the wretched hinges groaned. Another leap. The lower hinge was giving way!

"Come!" cried out Gus Schaftsmire.

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"Every one of you! Put your hands on this here door! We got to hold it in place somehow! Do you want that beast to git his head in here? He's as strong as a bull!" And he strained every nerve, for, at the sound of his voice, the dog gave a bellow so vindictive and fierce that the stout young Dutchman closed his eyes and breathed hard.

The Sawreys, disturbed at their peaceful supper table, had come to the windows. Mrs. Sawrey, planting herself firmly in her daughter's way, cried out:

"Go back, Evey! Go back! Mr. Sawrey," she went on hysterically, "I won't live in Partlettsville if this sort of thing goes on! It is barbarous! Right in sight of the church, too! And in twenty minutes the young girls will be going by to choir practice!"

Mr. Sawrey's money was fairly dancing in his pockets, he rattled it so vigorously in his anger and helplessness.

"Go out of my yard!" he commanded; "every one of you! Who gave you permission to come in here? My word! I declare

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it's a most outrageous display of passion and ignorance! Old woman, I'm speaking to you! Take that beast away — I won't have him on my premises; can't you see that he's frightening my wife and child? And you — at your age! I wonder that you're not ashamed to make such a display of yourself!"

The old woman turned slowly. At times there was a strange sort of dramatic dignity in her movements. There was now, as she held her lantern out at arm's length, and advanced toward the open window. But as she came within the square of light, a scream was drawn from Mrs. Sawrey. And small wonder!

She presented an appearance both piteous and repellent. Her grey hair had come unbound; it was hanging in elf-locks, and was stained and flecked with the blood which was flowing from the wound in her forehead; her face was streaked with mud; her dress, all disarranged, was dabbled with red clay to the knees, giving evidence of her hasty pur-

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suit on foot down the hill of Partletts'. The hand holding the lantern aloft trembled with agitation; and her harsh old face had suddenly lost its well defined lines, — it was broken into wrinkles and was working with irrepressible emotion.

She stood out in the square of light from the window, looking with concentrated gaze at Deacon Sawrey. But she had no consciousness whatever of her own appearance. It never occurred to her that any one looking at her must unhesitatingly have denominated her crazy. She had but one idea in her mind, one intention in her heart, and in this absorption all else was ignored. She glanced up at the hysterical woman in the window with an expression of contempt.

"Mr. Sawrey," she said, in a voice which she evidently strove to make calm, "I have come here to get my child! I must have him before they frighten him any more. He is in there — in great terror! You will help me get him?"

But the deacon did not move.

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"If you were half a man you would come down here and help me!" she cried, her voice rising; then bitterly: "Oh, not that you will! Why should you help any one who is weak and defenceless! But he belongs to me, and I tell you I will have him back!"

"And by what right does he belong to you?" asked Deacon Sawrey, throwing back his head to look at her judicially and nodding once or twice. "Just tell me by what right?"

"By this right!" she answered slowly and distinctly, coming a step nearer the window, and leaning forward to look with intent earnestness into the man's face; "that I love him! And is there another being in the world who does? No! Then that's my right! And I'll hold to it, too!" she added passionately, "and claim it, and make it good!"

"Then," said Deacon Sawrey, still nodding judicially, while he stood, his whole figure slightly swaying, hands in pockets, "if you're so sure you've a good right, why don't

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you go to the law about it? What's all this bother about? If you've a good right, go to the law, that's my advice."

The old woman saw the mockery in his face.

"And what do I care for your law," she cried out violently, "when I have some one to fight for me who is brave and strong, and has a greater heart than your narrow little soul ever dreamed of!"

"Ha, ha!" burst out Deacon Sawrey. "Do you mean the dog?"

"I mean the dog!" she replied in a hoarse voice, and turned from him.

"Much obliged, I'm sure! Much obliged!"

But sarcasm and words died. The next instant such a scream arose from the hen-house, such a roar and rush that it seemed as if bedlam itself were turned loose there.

And above all came the hoarse voice, crying:

"At them again, John man! At them again!"

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And then the screams rose. Screams no longer of mockery or anger, but of fear.

"For God's sake, Missis, call your dog off!" came Gus Schaftsmire's voice. "I swear I can't hold this door no longer; it's comin' to pieces! He'll kill us, that's what it'll be!"

"Be it on your own heads!" cried the Witch.

The dog obeyed the excitement in her voice, and dashing forward, hurled himself again at the door. There was a crash; a plank loosened and fell aside, and those within began to whimper like children, and even groaned aloud.

"If you do murder down there, I warn you you'll repent it!" called Deacon Sawrey, now entirely frightened himself.

And it seemed that a dreadful catastrophe was imminent. What was to prevent it? The dog, with his great weight and strength, was certain to break the frail barricade; both strength and courage of the besieged were wavering; the door was crumbling.

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And behind that door John o' Partletts' smelled his enemies — enemies caught red-handed!

It was Jim who saved them all. Jim — left alone when all rushed to hold the door, and wonderfully stimulated by the sound of his friend's voice — looked about him. Every one had forgotten, perhaps no one knew, that Jim could climb like a squirrel. There was a window high in the rear, near it a sort of pole which had once been a hen-roost. Up this he shinned, reached the window, and the next instant was in the branch of a friendly tree. To drop to the ground, run round the house, and place himself beside his friend, was the work of a minute.

Then the old Witch, scarcely believing her own ears, heard a small, deep voice saying right at her elbow:

"Mis' Beevish, here I is!"

That night, as the stars shone through the tall fir trees of Partletts', a silent trio passed the big pine and the little one, and, turning

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into the narrow path, saw the tiny cottage standing, a dark speck in the starlight.

The dazed terror was gone from Jim's face, all the fury from the old Witch's, and, as John o' Partletts' raised his great head and the clear light of the stars gleamed upon his little eyes, none would have recognized the fierce beast with murder in his throat.

The hostile world was behind. Enmity and struggle were forgotten. Solitude, silence, and the sight of the peaceful home awaiting them, cast a benediction over each.

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CHAPTER XV.

PARTLETTS'

THE long summer had waned. The bright tints of autumn had replaced its vivid green. Over the southern slope of Partletts', down as far as eye could reach, to the verge of the ocean itself — which rolled, changing and blue as a liquid sky — there was a blaze of gold and red. The great, full beeches stood up, a dull bronze, and the shaded leaves and berries of the dogwood were of such a brilliant crimson that they seemed to flicker like flame in the sunlight.

Looking down that steep slope, with the snowy shelf of beach and vivid ocean for frame, the eye was lost, and the senses seemed to swim in the riot of color made dazzling by the clear, penetrating sunshine, and ever softly undulating in the constant

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breeze that swept up from the ocean, smelling of brine.

And there was one person, whose senses — in the eyes of the world not of the soundest order — swam indeed.

Little Jim, trundling a wheelbarrow, an old cap on the back of his head, and busily engaged in "gyardin-in'," would stop in his work, and in the long confabs between himself and the various plants and tools and utensils: — That is, he would remark to a geranium cutting: "Here you is — fine fo' Mis' Beevish window pot!" And then he would make the cutting reply: "No, sah! Leaf me be — don't put no sha'p knife on me!" To which he would respond in his own person: "Hi! So! You be fine in Mis' Beevish window! An' I promise yo' dat's whar yo' gwine! Come 'long, Mr. Trowel, an' help we fo' git planted!" And Mr. Trowel would reply: "Oh, I is tired o' workin' all de time! I is ol' an' rusty, honey, an' my p'int is mos' gone! Leaf me res'!" — As has been said, Jim would pause in all

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this business and confabulation sometimes and just sit back on his heels and stare and stare.

He would stare down that wondrous slope minute after minute until all its light, movement, and color filled his eyes. Filled his heart, too; and his senses swam in a child-like, sweet and deep contentment.

And there was no one to hurry him; no one to disturb him. Perhaps, by his side, in the warm sunshine, lay a great hairy form with eyes half closed, but ever watchful; for since that August night the little black figure was never left unguarded. And, perhaps, through some window a red headdress could be seen dodging back and forth, and occasionally a pair of sharp blue eyes would peer through the pane; but they always withdrew with an expression of satisfaction in them at sight of the dog and child, and Jim might have stared until the stars were shining without fear of admonition or reproof.

But he had no wish to do so. It was pleasant to work when no one gave him heavy

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tasks, or made a great business of seeing them done on time, but where, on the contrary he was praised and admired for what he did accomplish. And he was to be seen constantly trundling his wheelbarrow, patting bits of brick and pebble into the garden beds, raking the walks, tying and pruning plants and bushes, — for Jim had careful hands, and when not frightened or ordered peremptorily, could accomplish many tasks very nicely. And when he was not talking to himself, or the tools, or John o' Partletts', he could be heard singing in his deep little voice, which was rather tuneless, but had something very care-free and gay in its sound:

"Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin' me!"

And wherever he went, there, pawing after, was the great beast, ever watchful.

And when pear-picking season came, Jim scored another triumph. For the Witch had two pear trees, and it was her wonder and

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admiration to see his little, light figure poised among the branches, moving so agilely, never breaking a twig. John o' Partletts' was called upon to look and admire. Which undoubtedly he did; but he had no tail to wag, no ears to cock, and a face which nature had not planned for expressing the softer feelings. But Jim and the old Witch thought he understood, and were well satisfied when he lowered his great head and looked at them with his alert, watchful eyes.

And then — what was most surprising! — it turned out that Jim was a remarkable cook. His Grandmammy had been a famous one, and he had watched her so much that he knew "jes' how to fix things!" Not but what he was too shy to put forward his abilities in this direction at first; — but, on occasion, being asked to watch the pot for the old Witch, it became evident that he could fry, bake, and broil, with the cleverness of his race.

This pleased the old woman vastly, and she would watch him fry bacon and turn eggs

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with unceasing expressions of admiration at his dexterity. And Jim would talk to the frying-pan, and admonish the bacon to "lie straight in de dish dar!" and inquire politely of the eggs, "if dey was dun and ready fo' be turn over?" all in his deep, serious little voice. And the old Witch would laugh until the tears came. And then Jim, finding himself regarded as a fine performer, talked faster, and more, bringing tongs, poker, and even the wood burning in the stove, into the conversation, all the while maintaining a most serious and wise-like expression; looking for all the world like a little black owl, gifted with hands and the mystery of cookery.

And John o' Partletts' would shake his head and even make a clumsy dash with his great paws, as if he too knew it was a good thing to play, and was trying to recollect that he had once been a puppy.

Then Jim would turn around and assure him:

"Oh, yo' name is in de pot, Marse Johnny!

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Don' yo' fear dat! Yo' name is in de pot!"

For Jim never presumed to address John o' Partletts' as anything but "Marse Johnny" after the custom of his race in speaking to animals owned by "white quality."

And it was odd in the morning to see the child with serious, respectful little face, serving out "Marse Johnny breakfast," while the great dog stood gravely watching the liberal supply of sugar scattered over his porridge; — for Jim had discovered that John o' Partletts', despite his ferocious appearance, had a very sweet tooth.

Whenever they went abroad now it was always, as Gus Schaftsmire said, "in a trio." And this was esteemed necessary for purposes of self-protection; but they enjoyed it much because they were a fervent mutual admiration society, — and all that the world saw odd or repellent in each, they saw not at all.

What the world called "mooniness" in

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little Jim, the Witch found perfectly natural. In her eyes John o' Partletts' was not a hideous, ferocious mongrel, he was an intelligent creature, wonderfully made, with the beauty and awesomeness of mighty strength. When she saw him bounding over the earth she would shake her head and exclaim:

"What a creature! What power the Lord has given him!"

And as to the old woman herself, the world had not a doubt that she was mad, but the child and dog believed in her to the last fibre of their beings, and they followed her old blue cotton skirts and red cambric headdress about with as much confidence and devotion as if she had been Balkis, the great queen of wisdom and wealth.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE RED BRAND AT PARTLETTS'

In the large town of Abbottsville nobody paid much heed to the Witch and her retainers. Among the hundreds of country rigs that were driven into its main street every day, representing all degrees of prosperity and dilapidation, her strange old vehicle was remarked, of course, for its appearance must have caused remark anywhere, — but no one paid more than passing attention, and no one ever molested her. Here there was no feeling of personal antagonism to her, and, moreover, Abbottsville was a big, thriving town, and people had their own affairs to attend to.

The Witch would peacefully steer her equipage in and out among the other vehicles, alight before her tradesman's door and make her purchases.

This tradesman was an individual. On one

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side he came of Yankee blood, on the other it was said there was a French strain. At any rate, his name, William Finn, was Yankee enough; and his manners, polite, with a touch of distinction, might have suggested to the imaginative a distant connection with the French court.

And, of course, with such fine manners, one might have expected to be cheated in the store of Mr. William Finn! But no such thing! Mr. Finn was honest; it was his habit, and nothing could shake him in it; and, moreover, he was good-hearted, and obliging. A treasure of a tradesman! And therefore the Witch had selected him for hers.

These trips to Abbottsville were in the nature of outings, everything about them being so pleasant. The Abbottsville turnpike was wide and shady, the old horse walked leisurely, John o' Partletts' had a fine chance to stretch his long legs, and he felt like a lord, for he never met a dog as big as he, and those he did meet respectfully turned out of his way. Little Jim, sitting in state on the

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front seat of the old vehicle, loved to listen to the dreamy creak of the wheels, to watch the passing teams and the sunshine breaking through the thick chestnut trees in changing patterns over the broad road. The Witch looked, as she felt, important, and intent upon her little business of buying to the best advantage of herself and her retainers.

And then, in Abbottsville, the wait before Mr. Finn's store, was a wonderful time for Jim. He would sit watching the people and teams and cars go by, feeling just a little frightened at the thought that there was so much bustle and business in the world.

And at length out would come smiling Mr. Finn, bearing a box from which could be seen sticking all sorts of packages: potatoes, sugar, dried herrings on a string, a flitch of bacon, etc. And when this was slid into the back of the equipage, very carefully lest the loose board should be displaced, and when John o' Partletts' had come out from among the wheels and stretched and stood ready to depart, and when the Witch had, with great

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dignity, mounted into her seat and gathered the reins, Mr. Finn always remarked:

"Well, Ma'm, I see you have your friends with you. And the old horse is still travelling, — as I hope he'll continue to do for many a day!"

"Thank you, Mr. Finn!" the Witch would reply, with a bow of her own. "I hope so, with all my heart!"

And thus they parted with mutual satisfaction; the one to disappear behind his counter, the other to turn her old horse's head toward Partletts', with the comfortable feeling that her larder was stocked for a week to come.

And then back along the broad, shady road, over which the first shadows of evening by this time would be stealing, with the thought of home awaiting them; — the hilltop, bathed in the warm light of the setting sun, and the tiny cottage among its flowers.

One thing, however, could change the aspect of these three as by magic. Any sight,

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sound, or reminder of Partlettsville! At such reminder the Witch's eyes would flash, her old face become contorted with rage and antagonism; the dog's hair would bristle, his lips snarl, — he was the wild dog again, fierce and unsparing; and as for little Jim, he seemed to shrink very small, the dreamy look of contentment would go out of his face and his eyes begin to roll in his head in a manner peculiar to him when frightened or distressed.

And though they never went to Partlettsville, yet it seemed that Partlettsville was ever at their door. Constantly they met Gus Schaftsmire on the road; or Louisa Myers, driven in a hired wagon to look after her goods at the Abbottsville station; or even Mr. Carruthers himself, striding along, pale, straight, self-contained, who recognized their presence by a more marked rigidity in face and form. He never spoke to them now unless quite face to face, thereby marking his disapproval of the old woman yet more definitely than formerly.

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The Witch knew well that since that August night when she had recovered Jim her name was more execrated in Partlettsville than ever before. And though she despised the Partlettsville people, and looked at them with defiance and hatred, yet, in her secret heart, she did have a fear; especially as to Jim! The sight of a Partlettsville wagon therefore was enough to set her muttering to herself: "You'll not take him from me! Never! Never!" And once when Gus Schaftsmire, passing her on the road, leaned out of his wagon and looked at her with a loud, meaning laugh, she was on her feet in an instant:

"Oh, you mean bully! Why are you leering at me with such a malicious look?"

"Out of love," exclaimed Gus, tickled almost to death. "Out of love and friendliness; ain't we neighbors?"

"No! you're no neighbor of mine, you thief and robber!" cried the Witch. "Get along over the road, or I've some one here who'll make you!"

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Indeed John o' Partletts' had already advanced from his post at the rear, and was drawing up upon Gus, his huge head lowered, and thrust forward threateningly.

Gus needed no second warning.

"An' you old fiend, you!" he muttered, as he shot by. "You'd ought to have your house burned over your head!"

It was these words — perhaps merely thrown out at random — that made the Witch absolutely sure, a week later, that an attempt was made to fire her house.

The Fall had waned, Indian Summer come and gone. The glory of color that had made the woods gorgeous lay on the ground in masses of fading red and gold, carpeting the slope of Partletts' from brow to ocean.

And all through this wood of Partletts' the thick underbrush stood bare and shivering, while here and there patches of dried woods and tall grasses rattled their brown stalks mournfully.

There was nothing bright in the landscape

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now save the sunsets; the weather had been dry and windy for long, and the sun daily set in a cloud-sea of red and gold.

Every afternoon the old woman came to the kitchen door and watched the great orb dropping oceanward.

On one memorable afternoon the wind blew high, straight up from the ocean, bending trees and underbrush on a slant toward the top of the hill so that they all had the appearance of striving to tear from their roots and reach the summit.

As the Witch opened her door as usual and looked out it seemed as if all the wood were rushing toward her. It was a beautiful sight, the tall trees bent as supple as saplings, never for an instant straightening, so constant was the gale, and the sun setting red, while a film of purple came sweeping along the horizon, fast covering its face, until a soft twilight seemed shed over the bending wood.

The old woman called to Jim, and they both stood, holding the door in the teeth of

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the wind, while they peeped through at the swaying wood. John o' Partletts', having no special taste for beauties of the landscape, lay stretched before the stove, his head on his paws, his little eyes as usual but half closed, showing a watchful slit beneath each lid.

Suddenly a startled cry filled the little room and rang through the cottage. And the great dog was on his feet with a bound, every hair rising, and he stood, shivering, for the cry was repeated in the voice that he knew and loved.

It was the Witch's voice. She had passed outside of the door in order to see the better, and now she stood, her breast heaving, her eyes flashing, pointing down the hillside.

For, what was that circling down there? Something brighter than the sunlight! Something that seemed at first glance part of the whirling, colored leaves. Now it seemed to separate itself from leaves and grasses and leap as if with its own strength through the clear air toward the tree-tops; to sink again

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and become part of the leaves in their dance; creeping through them, and onward, advancing with sudden speed, and springing high again.

"Fire!" cried the old woman, in a voice made deep by terror. "The underbrush is on fire!"

She stood still a moment, gazing; a moment in which all the reality of the situation rushed upon her. The wind, coming straight up the hillside, already sent the stifling smell of smoke into her face. She glanced about her, at the tall weeds, all uncut, about her cottage. Had the fire come on the opposite side the open plot of her garden would have protected her, but it was rushing up at the back, where the weeds, swayed forward by the wind, rubbed against the very boards of her house!

She looked again toward the woods. The trees, still full of sap, had not caught, — it was only the underbrush. But there a dead pine stood; all around it was a smother of smoke, then a flame leaped, a branch caught,

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then another, and another, up, up, until the whole tall tree stood against the sky, its outlines lost in flame and smoke, like a forest torch.

In that pine tree she seemed to see the fate of her cottage. And she gave a cry more bitter and terrified than the first, a cry in which despair was mingled with dread. For in that moment she seemed to see herself — an old woman — stripped of all — home, possessions swallowed in that pitiless, onrushing destruction.

But not without a struggle! No, let the odds be ever so long, this was a woman who was born to strive, to do battle, to face an enemy, be it man or fate!

In a desperate emergency she could appear almost grand. Her old hawk face became set and motionless, only her lips were compressed, and her eyes seemed to concentrate in points of light.

"Jim, child!" she cried out suddenly, "you must help me! It's you and me — you and me — against that!"

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Poor Jim had stood cowering against the side of the door, hardly understanding as yet the meaning of the menace before them. The Witch, as she spoke, rushed back into the cottage, and threw the door open. As she did so, the dog, who had stood, as it were, on the edge, gave a bound. Through the open door he saw the approaching danger, he smelled the heavy smoke and he threw up his head with a long, low howl, his eyes glowing with defiance and excitement, as if, by the very force of his strength and fierceness, he would turn its course.

But no, John o' Partletts', this was not a fight that you could enter into! It was a fight that required human intelligence, wit, reason. A fight for the old woman, and the little, meagre child!

Little enough, and meagre enough, yes, but obedient and trusting! Therefore he did not lose his head, or scream, or run to seek safety for himself. Only, when the old woman, running from the house again, and selecting a spot at a little distance from the cottage,

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stooped, and deliberately set fire to the weeds; only then did he, for a moment, roll his eyes in protesting wonder, and cry out:

"What you do, Mis' Beevish? Yo' da bring him nearer! Yo' da bring de fire nearer!"

"No, child, no!" she cried. "I'm fighting fire with fire! It's all that's left for us to do! Fire with fire!" she repeated, standing up and looking at the oncoming welter of smoke as if it were a sentient enemy and could understand the defiance.

Then quickly, quickly must they set fire to the weeds, and then swiftly, before it got beyond their control, beat it out. The Witch with a great shovel, the child with a broom. Now they accomplished a narrow semicircle of charred space around the side of the cottage, much too narrow in the face of that leaping, wind-driven foe! It must be gone over again and again and widened.

They widened it, the child panting from his exertions; even in the cold, keen wind the sweat running down his forehead into his

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eyes. The woman's cotton dress, which twice the fire had seized and been beaten out of, hung frayed and scorched; her hands were burnt, and, worst of all, she feared that their efforts would prove useless; but still she struggled on.

"Work, Jim!" she screamed to the straining child, rushing to the far end of the semicircle, to go its length yet again. And Jim sprang forward, and, as she fired the dry grass, beat the bursting flames with all his fast ebbing strength. And all this while the huge, strong dog, helpless to assist, but filled with a great, brute sympathy, ran up and down the length of their poor little boundary, almost in the fire, singeing his hair, scorching his paws, and sending out his wild, excited bark in challenge and defiance.

And now they could do no more, for the fire was upon them. Its smoke was in their faces, its roar in their ears. They felt its hot breath, and drew back as far as the cottage.

Their burnt space *is* too narrow; far too narrow to arrest that rushing enemy! The

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Witch, seeing it, turned and covered her face with her hand. Jim hid his eyes in his arm, his exhausted little body shaking. And the great dog drew back, unwillingly, step by step, with a fierce dignity baring his teeth.

On crept the fire to the verge of the semicircle, and the cruel flame tongues were outstretched. But as suddenly as it had come upon them, just as suddenly it veered. A counter current of air had brushed it, — in that instant it licked up the last tall weeds along the semicircle, languished, drooped, had not the strength to overleap the burnt space, and seemed for the moment all but quenched. But, determined not to die, and fanned now by another sudden rush of wind, it swept away toward the left, on to the brow of the hill, to flame there, a beacon to Partlettsville in the valley below.

The menace had come and gone, swift in its passage as only fire and wind may be! The last rays of the setting sun fell upon the little cottage; and the old woman, who, a moment before, had seen her home threat-

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ened, and herself destitute, raised her head, exclaiming in a trembling voice of gratitude:

"O — bountiful God!"

That night, long and late, the old woman sat at an upper window. Shaken to the soul, her past seemed to rise within her, and to pass in review before her, as a man when drowning finds his whole life emerging from his subconsciousness to look him in the face. She seemed to see herself in the years before she came to Partlettsville — with a great fortune, but striving ever, and ofttimes with those of her own blood, to retain her rights and possessions. Striving in her own way, scorning advice and ways and means which often seemed to her sordid; disdaining lawyers, whom she distrusted; depending upon herself, proud, single-handed, alone. And she seemed to feel again the sense of passionate injustice as her possessions gradually slipped from her into the hands of those shrewder than herself. She seemed to see herself as she had been all her life, striving

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against many of the powers that be, as by some necessity of her nature, inveighing against hypocrisy and all narrow, unsympathetic conventions — scorning so much that was held dear by her own class — until that very class had come to regard her not only as strange and eccentric but even as half mad. Then, as an old woman, broken in fortune, but not in spirit, with the horror of that stigma of half-mad upon her, she had turned her back upon them, determined to seek in some corner of the world a community of people, simple, plain, human. She had found Partletts', where the Spirit of Truth had spoken to her soul, promising her peace. She had bought her bit of land, built her house, and laid out her garden. And during this process she had come to know Partlettsville. For her it had been a bitter knowledge — perhaps the bitterest of her life — for she had found here the narrowness, lack of sympathy, suspicion, from which she had fled. Cruelty and scorn she had found here!

She sat for a long, long time, gazing with

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narrowed eyes, and in her stern, proud old face an expression of bitterness grew and grew until it seemed to pierce the darkness and distance, and even the hill itself, to the little town beyond. From there she believed had come the danger that had almost overpowered her to-day. There, she told herself, dwelt enemies, who were willing, not merely to sport with her, but to ruin her!

Suddenly she brought her clenched hand down upon the window-ledge with a gesture of uncontrolled violence, giving vent to her tumultuous thoughts and feelings, and rose, looking down over the hillside, her face white and drawn in its expression of anger, resentfulness, and lonely grief. At her feet rose a rasping snarl that seemed the accompaniment of her sudden movement, and in an inner room, a fevered child turned on his bed with a moan, as if, in his sleep, he had seen a dark and threatening vision.

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CHAPTER XVII

CLERICAL AND OTHERWISE

It was in no conciliating frame of mind that the Witch opened her door to Mr. Carruthers a short while after the above event. Her heart was sore, and her mind full of such bitter suspicions that every one who came from Partlettsville was, in some degree, connected with them. As he entered the cottage she gave him such a strangely meaning glance that he lost no time in opening his subject. It concerned the guardianship of Jim, which he proposed undertaking himself. And she, on her part, losing no time, instantly declared with vehemence that she would sooner see the child dead than placed in the care of the man before her.

"Madam," expostulated the minister, laying his hand upon the table, "let me advise you to use more temperate language! You

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have — and you know it — no power to retain this child. I have — or shall soon have — absolute power to take him from you. Besides this, I must advise you to generally conduct yourself with less animosity toward the people of my parish. You have already antagonized them by your conduct, and I warn you that you may drive them to take an action against you, that will cause you pain — "

The old woman started violently.

" Ah! " she cried suddenly. " They have already done me an injury! I believe you know it well, Henry Carruthers! " she went on, her face contracting with the emotion that took possession of her. " You are all — down there would-be murderers! You would have burned me alive in my house — "

" I don't know what you are speaking of," he interrupted resolutely. " I am speaking of the future, not the past."

But she went on, unheeding.

" Did you imagine that I could be deceived? " She whirled round, and pointed

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with a trembling hand down the hill. "The fire on the side that would do me the most harm! The wind raging straight up! Oh —!" she laughed violently. "Henry Carruthers!" she exclaimed, striking her hand down upon the table so vehemently, and so near his own, that he involuntarily started. "When that fire was set last week, to burn an old woman out of her home — to make her lose everything she possessed — an old, friendless woman, who never comes into your church, so why consider her? You were sitting in your study, preparing your sermon for Sunday, no doubt! For you are one of those always found in the right place at the right time! But was there not a smile on your face? A smile, Henry Carruthers? Yes — you knew what was going forward, you knew!"

The tall man drew himself up. He looked at the shaking, excited old woman with a scorn he could not repress. Exhibitions of uncontrolled feeling were extremely repugnant to him.

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"And do you imagine that I would stoop to any act of malevolence?" he asked in his coldest tone. "I, or any of my parishioners?"

She interrupted him with a sudden laugh.

"And it is just what your parishioners — some of them — would do! Any act of meanness or cowardice! It is *you* who do not understand them!" she added, and she leaned forward and looked him in the face. "With all your known merits, all your great self-esteem, you cannot imagine yourself to be a reader of men; an interpreter of the souls about you! You have not the sympathy or the ability to interpret human beings truly!" she added with steady conviction, her voice for the moment losing its emotional ring and becoming calm and judicial.

It seemed that she had struck him upon a sore spot. Perhaps the man had, himself, at some time, felt the latent truth of what she spoke. At any rate, the anger that, for the moment, faded from her face seemed to flash into his.

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"I have sufficient understanding of human nature for my purposes, and for the purposes of those about me," he answered with proud conciseness.

She drew a step nearer, looking in his face.

"And do you believe it possible to sufficiently understand human nature, which is so strange, so complicated?" she asked, with a gravity that was almost sadness.

He looked at her, and struck by the intent and earnest expression of her face, might perhaps have made her some propitiating answer. But, even as he looked, the harsh, defiant light reappeared in her eyes, and with sarcastic bitterness she resumed:

"But, I know, to a gentleman of your stamp, criticism of any kind is unacceptable!"

He raised his head in response to her words.

"I did not come here to argue," he replied coldly; "I came to take the boy away; but, as I see it would be impossible to do so without violence, I shall leave the affair until it

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can be taken in hand in a more dignified manner. And I hope that will be soon."

"You mean —!" she exclaimed, her face turning very white, and her words catching a little in her throat, "you mean to take some show of legal authority?"

"I mean the matter to be decided impersonally," he replied; "not on the ground on which you are determined to put it, — merely as if it were a fight between you and me."

"Listen to me!" cried out the old woman suddenly. "Send no one here for him! — for, if you do, he will wish he had never come! I'll have no care for what happens!" she went on threateningly, losing all her calmness of a moment before. "I'll never let this child go back to you! And he'll die if he does! It will kill him! He can't stand your treatment down there. How did I find him? How pitiful only I know! Sick, half-starved, tormented! — and he had been beaten that morning by *you*, Henry Carruthers!" The minister made a quick, impa-

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tient movement. He regarded her statements as gross exaggerations. She held her breath with a half-sob before she went on. "And I can tell you how unjustly!" she added, catching his arm, as he was about moving away; and rapidly she poured a tale into his ear, in which Willie Merryweather's name figured frequently. He listened, more than half incredulous, but with an arrested attention.

When she had finished, with a nervous violence she put out her hand and pushed him from her.

"There," she exclaimed, "go back to your own kind! I tell you what they are, but, such as they are, you love them!"

And as he strode off swiftly down the hill she stood in her doorway following his progress with narrowed eyes in which irrepressible dread and grim determination struggled.

"The law!" she muttered. "The law! So you would bring legal authority even here, would you? — to take him from me!"

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Though Mr. Carruthers was always skeptical as to any information received through such a medium as the Witch, yet she had spoken with sufficient detail of Willie Merryweather for him to feel it incumbent on him to approach Kitty on the subject of her son's possible misbehavior.

Kitty, outraged to the last degree, unhesitatingly informed him that the Witch owed her an imagined grudge and "took it hout in any form of spite that came handy!" And Willie, called to assist in his own defence, ably seconded his mother, was humility itself, whined, and in the extremity of his injured feelings, even shed tears, declaring in the most pronounced manner that he "never had done nothin' to nobody!" and "didn't understand what nobody meant!"

Mr. Carruthers, utterly unable to clear up the matter, went away with mingled feelings of annoyance and confusion. A lie was such a hideous thing to his very upright nature that the mere suspicion of one threw him into a sort of mental disorder; and to be-

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lieve Willie Merryweather capable of barefaced falsehood seemed, in a way, to belie his own teaching, influence and judgment, for personally he had rather a liking for the boy. Nor was this so very strange, because the Willie whom he knew was very different indeed from the Willie with whom little Jim was intimately acquainted.

Accordingly he dismissed the matter from his mind with the feeling that the Witch had been playing upon her imagination, and that all she said was on a par with her mad hallucination that he, Henry Carruthers, was implicated in a plot to burn down her house.

With his usual long strides he made his way back to the rectory. But had any one watched him narrowly it might have been seen that his step was a little less vigorous than it had once been, and that he looked down more often, as if he were studying the ground beneath his feet. The dark hair upon his temples had become during the last months sprinkled with grey, and, though he

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was scarcely forty, he had the appearance of a man ten years older.

In truth he was a very desolate and lonely man. That void which had opened within him and all about him, on that morning when his wife died, was as wide and deep as then. There seemed nothing in the world that could fill it, or assuage the ache of it. Life seemed empty. Only the word Duty was as plainly before his eyes as ever. On that one word, that one thought, he fastened his whole attention. Each day he grew stricter and sterner, both with himself and others; more concise and formal in every action; more sparing even of his words.

There was no gentle voice now to remind him that it is a world in which nature blooms and often shows a smiling face; that life is not all harsh, but full of beauty and love, too; and that skies, though they are stormy, can also be star-lit.

And being naturally of a very serious and grave nature, he forgot these things.

He never gave himself any recreation;

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he never laughed. And now gradually recreation and laughter had come to seem to him unnecessary and discordant.

His children had learned that if they romped his study door would open and a stern voice ask: "What noise is that?" It is true, they seldom enough romped. And when old Elsa, early in the Spring, had been found by him planting out some of his little lady's geraniums, she had been reproved.

"You complain that you are pressed for time," he had said, tersely; "leave the flowers then."

Perhaps it had pained him to see the flowers that his wife had loved, planted by another. At any rate, not a flower bloomed about the rectory that Summer; it was a bare spot. "Desolate enough for the bairns, poor hearts!" complained Elsa.

And now the bairns, looking out of the kitchen window, dropped back hastily.

"Father's coming!" was whispered.

Only little Margy kept her place. Less afraid of the stern man than they, she even

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peeped at him archly as he came up the flagged walk. But, catching his eye, and alarmed at her own boldness, she jumped down, too, and ran to hide her face in Elsa's apron, who, stopping in her work, and putting her hand on the shining head, asked:

"What's the matter now?"

"He saw me!" whispered a smothered little voice. "Father saw me!"

"Saw you?" exclaimed the old woman sharply. "An' what if he did, dearie? Who's a better right to look in a man's face than his own childer, eh? Tell me that!"

And she glanced toward the hall, whence came the sound of a closing door, as if she would have liked to ask that question of some one other than Margy.

And as the grave man caught a glimpse of the little, vanishing head he came into his house with a heavier step; for it recalled all too vividly one whose hair had been of a like color, of the tender, haunting brightness of spring daffodils.

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But who shall express the rage and indignation meanwhile reigning in the house of Merryweather! Had Willie been an abused archangel he could not have received more sympathy or glorification. And Maggie, out of her honest soul, having protested: "But he *did*, you know — he *did* treat the nigger bad!" was soundly boxed and pushed into a corner for being "an unloyal hussy." And Kitty, late that evening, when she was closing her shutters, turned her sharp, keen face toward Partletts', sleeping peacefully beneath the starlight, declaring her deep-rooted intention to "Git even with that crazy old loon yet! I'll do it!" she added, "even if it *costs* me somethin'!"

And for Kitty — that was an ominous threat indeed!

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CHAPTER XVIII

DEACON SAWREY EXPLAINS

If Kitty Merryweather's temper was blazing against the Witch, there were others as hot.

It had been generally believed that she would weary of her guardianship of the hill, and that, as time went on, she and John o' Partletts' would be less belligerent. They should have known her better.

Feeling as she did — whether rightly or wrongly — that those below had attempted to do her the bitter injury of burning her house, the Witch's long cherished dislike of them was fanned to an intensity of suspicion and fear that scarcely knew bounds. She now believed them capable of anything. In fact they stood as convicted in her eyes. The act she believed they had meditated revealed to her imagination a very blackness of soul

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which made her both shudder and rage. She massed all Partlettsville in her suspicions; and, whereas formerly she had endeavored to avoid her enemies down there, now she thought and brooded over them continually. The outcome was that she could no longer keep away from them. Drawn by the absorbing wish to make her displeasure and presence felt, she gave up her former wise course of never going near them, and again the old horse and strange trio were to be seen trailing through the main street of Partlettsville, mocked at and mocking.

And more than once the Witch, provoked by taunts, had stood up and delivered a tirade, and, on these occasions, she appeared more crazy to those about her than ever before. More than likely it was only the presence of John o' Partletts' that saved her from injury of some kind. All feared the great dog, not only for his ferocity but for his sharpness and alertness; had any been bold enough to throw a missile he would unerringly have singled out the offender.

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There were some who regarded this as very good sport, but many of the dwellers in Partlettsville considered it a great scandal, and a most unnecessary disturbance. Mrs. Sawrey, who had already suffered such a painful fright, could never endure to see the equipage of the Witch, and declared that she was almost afraid to live in the vicinity of such a crazy-looking person. And it was the opinion of all that, whether crazy or sane, the old woman was a most undesirable neighbor.

"Something ought to be done," was remarked each time that the Witch made one of her appearances.

"And something *shall* be done!" said Deacon Sawrey mysteriously. "I do not intend that my wife shall be annoyed and frightened in a peaceful community — so called!" he added with sarcasm.

Now, any disturbance of the peace was as painful to little Jim as to the most conservative Partlettsvillite. He loved the quiet of

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the hill of Partletts', the routine of life there, alone with the old woman and the dog. He hated in proportion those trips into the town, and feared the unfriendly faces he saw there. He often tried by little ruses to keep the old woman at home.

"Mis' Beevish," he would exclaim, "'e gwine rain! Best not resk gwine so fur!"

And if the weather was so bright that rain could not possibly be predicted, Jim would still look skyward dubiously, sniff and say:

"Yes, de sun shine fo' sure! but 'e do *smell* like rain!"

And there was one thing that could always keep the old woman at home, and, moreover, seemed, for the time, to smooth out all passion and restlessness from her mind; this was interest in her garden. If Jim could once get her to planning a new bed for the Spring, or to talking of the names and habits of her various plants, a period of quiet home-abiding was sure to follow. Therefore when Jim saw, by her flashing eyes, and by a frequent and nervous straightening of

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her red headdress, that she was meditating overmuch upon her enemies, he would pick a handful of seed, — salvia, zinnia, or whatever came to hand — and adroitly begin on some such strain as this:

"Lor, Mis' Beevish, dere's mo' seed on dem dried up ole bushes dan yo' kin shake a stick at! Ain't we goin' to have no mo' o' dese kind o' flowers nex' year — long es we is got sech a sight o' seed fo' plantin'?"

And the old woman's eyes would cease to flash, she would grow calmer, and finally hold out her hand.

"Let me see, child — what seed is that?"

"'Tis de seed of a plant what in de Souf dey calls 'Ol' Maid,' an' besides, I hears some people call it 'Ol' Age an' Youf!'"

"No, no!" she would reply, examining the seed with sharp eyes. "That plant, child, belongs to the genus helianthoideae, and it is named zinnia after Dr. Zinn, a famous German professor, child, who spent his whole life studying plants and flowers. And that —" taking the little black seeds of

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the salvia into her hand, and turning them about lovingly "—is the salvia splendens, —it has been cultivated from the common, garden sage. Oh, I can't tell you how many varieties there are, but it belongs to the momardeae family!" And so on. All of which little Jim understood about as well as if she had elected to talk Greek. What he did understand, however, was the softened look of absorbed interest, and the disappearance of the flashing anger and restlessness.

Then the talk would drift on to the arrangement of some new flower-bed—if it should be crescent or heart-shaped; and finally the old woman would draw designs on a paper, while Jim made suggestions, and John o' Partletts' sat listening.

The afternoon would drift by; danger of mischief and the arousing of evil passions be averted; and thus the violent old woman, who scorned all advice, and whose heart was filled with bitterness and suspicions, lent herself, all unwittingly, to the direction of the child. For a sort of wisdom is some-

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times given into the hands of the very simple, unregarded and lowly, and, it is written: "A little child shall lead them!"

As the Fall drew to a close, and the high chill winds of early Winter began to sweep over the little town, there were others than Michaelson who looked up covetously at the tall trees upon the side of Partletts'. Many figured out the amount of wood in this clump, the amount of profit to be made from that, until, emboldened by these calculations, attempts were made from time to time, but always with the same result — failure.

At length Gus Schaftsmire, determining to show all Partlettsville that he was the man to get the better of "that there pair," put a pistol in his pocket, threw caution to the winds, and taking one of his father's horses to haul the wood back, went one night to hew down a tree.

Wonderful to relate, he accomplished his purpose uninterrupted. But just as he had loaded the wood on his drag, his horse, fright-

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ened by the flashing of the lantern, broke away and dashed through the underbrush toward the Witch's cottage. Gus, not daring to risk the loss of the animal, and emboldened by the feel of the loaded pistol, made after.

He caught his horse, and something beside.

Within the house the great dog, hearing the rush past the cottage, sprang up, his fore paws on the window-sill, and, seeing the intruder, unhesitatingly crashed through the pane and with a wild bound, and a scatter of falling glass, gave chase.

There was the report of a pistol, a terrible roar and snarl, before the Witch reached the scene. She saw her dog's head spattered with blood from his cuts, but supposing this to come from a shot wound, and fearing Gus would kill him, she rushed forward, caught hold of him, and prevented him from making a second attack.

Seeing Gus in her garden in the dead of night, her ready imagination led her to believe his presence boded some direful dis-

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aster, and she lost no time in informing him of her suspicions.

"I come to git my horse!" shouted Gus, holding on to his leg with a white face. "An' I'm bit!"

"Take your horse and go then!" she screamed back. "Look, you have hurt my friend here, you sneaking villain —"

"An' a fine friend!" interrupted Gus, too much enraged to be prudent. "Look at him! Look at your *friend!*"

The Witch looked down at the great bloody head and savage face, which wore a hideous grin in the presence of his enemy, — at the huge beast, trembling with anger, but obedient to her restraining hand. Perhaps at this moment she remembered another time when she had seen that head all bloody. At any rate her face suddenly grew white; an expression of violent emotion passed over it.

"He's what you've made him!" she cried. "You down there! You point to him as if he were the fiend incarnate; but did any of you ever do an act, even the slightest, of

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kindness to him? Why should he love you, eh? You would have let him starve — you, in your comfortable homes, with plenty to eat and drink! Did any of you remember that the same hand that made you, made him, and give him so much as a crust of bread? No! for if you had he would have remembered it! That dog — " pointing to the big, fierce head — " remembers kindness just as well as injuries! And, I warn you, be careful what you say before him. He listens to you and understands! "

" Yes! " leered Gus. " An' you an' he understand each other, don't you? Yes, you're a pair of you! " and he nodded his head mysteriously, as if he could explain that phenomenon if he would.

" And I understand *you!* " cried out the old woman suddenly. " I'm uncanny! I've bewitched this dog — we're in league with evil! Oh, I know what you say, down there, you poor, ignorant creatures! " she went on vehemently. " It was people like you who, in old times, burned the witches! "

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"Yes," roared Gus with conviction, as if she had made an uncommonly fine point there; "and a good thing, too!"

"Let me tell you," she exclaimed in a softer voice, for once unheeding his taunt, "the witchery I have used — it is kindness! Did you ever think of that? And let me tell you something else — something that minister of yours perhaps has never told you, with all his precepts and preachings! Remember that when you ill-treat any creature, be it ever so humble or despised, you do, not only it, but yourself, an injury! Do you know why? Because," she cried, with sudden emphatic earnestness, raising her face, and pointing upward to the star-lit sky, "you put yourself out of harmony with this great universe, and out of touch with the will of your Creator, who made all things!"

She stood with her form drawn up and her arm still raised, looking large in the darkness of the night, like a heaven-pointing statue of a woman.

And Gus, with unwonted quietness,

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mounted his horse, and when he had ridden away, turned and saw her still standing, with the great, fierce dog's head under her hand, as if she were, in some struggling way of her own, striving to communicate with the spirit of that universe — with the will of her Creator.

It was not until he was half-way down the hill, and Partlettsville again in sight, that he recovered his ease and self-possession sufficiently to mutter something about the "preachifyin' old lunatic!"

The day but one after this, Deacon Sawrey, seated comfortably in his parlor, surrounded by many treasures of the upholsterer's art in green and blue, and with the sunshine flickering discreetly over the carpet pattern through closed shutters and lace curtains, leaned back in his chair, and rattling the money in his pockets as an expression of his satisfaction, informed his wife that a matter he had lately much upon his mind, and given his earnest attention to, was quite

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clearing up, that is to say clarifying itself, and, in short, coming to a successful conclusion.

Mrs. Sawrey hoped sincerely that it was a successful money transaction, but she was scarcely less pleased when the deacon explained to her the matter in hand.

As he had been born in Partlettsville he knew as much about the property thereabouts as any one. He had always understood that the estate to which the hill of Partletts' belonged could not be sold as it was to be held in trust for a length of time which had not yet expired. Therefore, the agent who had sold the old woman her land had done it on his own responsibility, without due regard to exact, legal conditions — and therefore — and so on — and much more which was not exactly clear to Mrs. Sawrey's mind. What was clear, however, was that her husband had patiently and persistently, during three months, hunted out and communicated with the really responsible parties, whose interest he had aroused, partly

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through the weight of his own importance, and partly by representing in a vivid manner the awkward situation of Partlettsville in having a crazy and absolutely dangerous person in such close propinquity. And, with many flourishes of rhetoric, and many hints as to the ableness and cleverness with which he had conducted the affair, Mr. Sawrey at length gave his wife to understand that matters were so put in motion that all that was now necessary was the signature of a number of persons in Partlettsville to a paper containing a report of what he had set forth. Which paper was to be sent abroad to certain of the owners of Partletts', then travelling in Europe, who, after perusal, would undoubtedly put their signatures to another paper, which in time being returned to this country, would enable the owners on this side of the water to turn a little legal machinery which would eventuate in turning the old woman out of her property and freeing Partlettsville, be it hoped, of her presence forever.

Having delivered himself of these facts,

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Deacon Sawrey, with one last, triumphant jingle, took his hands out of his pockets, and standing up, shook out his trouser legs, looking down upon them with an expression of critical satisfaction.

"And so, my dear, by Spring I shall see that something radical is accomplished. In the meantime if it should come to the old woman's ears it might cause her to behave less offensively than formerly," he concluded with a smile which seemed to say that he had already spent too much of his valuable time upon such a trivial affair.

It chanced that on this same afternoon, at this very hour, the Witch and Jim were seated in the kitchen, with the big dog at their feet, earnestly discussing and absorbed in the most elaborate plans for the beautifying of the little place. There was to be a new star-shaped bed of red and white verbenas, like one which Jim had seen at "Marse Desverney's." There was to be a mound of fern and wild violets. A purple

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clematis was to be coaxed to grow with the white one which already covered the little porch. And finally Jim prophesied, with a solemn roll of his eyes, and a look of something like rapture pervading his earnest little countenance:

"Please de Lord, Mis' Beevish, when de Spring come we is goin' to make dis here de wery purties' spot ob groun' in de whole country!"

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CHAPTER XIX

WINTER

The driving storms of Winter were sending their snows flying over Partletts', swirling in the hollows and lying like a long, white mantle between the Witch's cottage and the ocean, along the smooth, steep slope.

Lonely enough was Partletts' now; neither hunter nor wood-cutter woke the silence, only could be heard the occasional snapping of a twig, the murmur, now low, now high, of the ever hurrying winds, and the scamper over the crusted snow of a rabbit. Down below, from the other side of the hill's crest, could be seen the Partlettsville high road, a line of white, broken by tracks of wheels, and here and there trampled into black, icy mud. And from the town itself rose the smoke from the chimneys, rising in a thin line into the cold air, then suddenly turned, harried, and driven earthward by the bleak wind.

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The row of firs on the crest of the hill, and the big pine and the little one bent to the same chill airs, but beyond, in the dip of the hollow, on the protected side of the hill, the Witch's cottage stood snug, and any night one might see the cheerful light from her kitchen windows shed in two bright streams over the lonely waste of white snow.

But it was seldom that any one passed here; once a month, however, in the early afternoon, several pedestrians made their way somewhat to the fore of the brow of the hill, down along the protected slope, and so on out of sight. They were very gay, and lively, and little; they wore mittens, or red gloves, and bright caps; they were, in fact, the children of the Partlettsville Sunday school choir on their way to the big church on the outskirts of Abbottsville, where children from all parts of the scattered countryside met once a month to practise together to the music of a fine organ. This choir practice was a great pleasure to the little ones, and it was seldom that the weather was

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too cold or rough for them to venture forth. Many a wild afternoon they could be seen scurrying along the road, their laughing faces held down against the wind, all venturesome, happy and ready for their three mile walk, which had the big church and wonderful organ at the end of it, and many faces as merry and rosy as their own to greet them.

Now, children do not always do as they are told, and these particular children having been warned to keep strictly to the highroad, and not to deviate therefrom, did nothing of the sort. Instead, they walked out of Partlettsville along the highroad until a turn hid them, and then they scrambled up the hill of Partletts' with all possible zeal and celerity, took a wood track which led within sight of the Witch's cottage, down on the far slope, and so on into the Abbottsville turnpike, thereby forming for themselves a steep, but very desirable short cut. Their "paddy-cut," they called it; and as soon as the town was out of sight the shout would go up:

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"Now for the paddy-cut!" And there would be a run and a dash, so that the bigger ones were half-way up the side of Partletts' before they paused to draw breath.

The parents of all those children would have been assured that the Witch would frighten them, or the big dog bite them, should they show their noses on Partletts'. But the children had found to the contrary. Though they had at first undertaken to venture over the hill in a spirit of daring, when they found it convenient and safe — for no one molested them — they made it their regular route. It is true that when they passed in sight of the Witch's cottage they made great haste and were very quiet, but for all that the Witch saw them, and John o' Partletts' *felt* them. Lying on the kitchen floor, with doors and windows all tightly shut, he would suddenly raise his great head, roll his eyes at the Witch, and his bristles could be seen to rise a little.

"Never mind, John man," the old woman would explain, "it's just the children!"

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And down would go the great head again, while the little, watchful eyes closed.

But the old woman would stand long at the window watching the hurrying little procession; and at such times there was a look upon her face so softened that those who saw it only under other circumstances must have wondered.

But now a very great loss and tribulation was come to Partletts'.

In the chill grey of an early winter's morning the Witch, Jim and John, ploughing forth through a heavy drift of snow, made their way to the little low-roofed stable whose solitary stall harbored the Witch's oldest friend. Very old was he, and he had passed through many hands before he came into her possession; patient and willing, with that almost infinite patience and willingness of the old work horse, old Job had served her with all his strength and intelligence for years.

But his strength had been waning; only

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an easy life and a minimum of labor had kept him on his legs during the last year. And lately the Witch had often stood by his stall watching Jim measure out the grain and shake out the straw with a deepening of her hawk eyes and a slow shake of her head.

This morning, Jim carrying the measure of oats as usual, the Witch unlocked the door, John pushed his great head forward, the three entered — and stood still.

In the silence of the night, with that quiet resignation that belongs to his kind, old Job had lain down upon his straw for the last time. From beneath an old, striped comforter pinned about him his legs stretched forth stiffly. They had moved over miles and miles of roadway, rough and even, stony and smooth, as Fate had sent, in the service of others; they would never bend to the will of man again!

The old woman quietly walked over to the side of the stall, and looked down upon the big, rusty head, the wide open eyes, and slowly the lines of her strong face broke in

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deep emotion, for, in this moment, she seemed suddenly to feel a whole world of patient endurance, tragedy, death epitomized in the rusty face, the wide, fixed eyes of her old horse.

She took a shawl from her shoulders, laid it over the still head and covered the set eyes.

"Come, little Jim!" she said softly.

And in silence the three filed out into the chill of the winter morning and the solemn quiet of the hill.

In the little stable all was very still. Old Job lay beside the strange old carriage, as ancient, decrepit, as much ridiculed in its time as he — but neither was ever to be seen upon the Abbottsville turnpike again.

In the very midst of her disinterested grief and sorrow for the old friend who had served her for so many years, the Witch began to feel herself confronted by a formidable, practical problem. She would not deal in Partlettsville — indeed the feeling between herself and the tradespeople there made such

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a thing impossible now. How, then, was she to obtain her supplies with the necessary regularity, her horse being dead and Abbottsville over three miles away? True, the hardy old woman and the dog were able to make this trip as often as was required, but the problem was concerning Jim.

The child had come to her delicate. His hard experiences in Partlettsville among strangers had undermined his slender store of vitality; care, and the healthful life of Partletts', had helped to pull him together; but his extreme terror on the August night when he was stolen, and also on the occasion of the fire scare at Partletts', had had their effect upon him. He was easily tired, and readily thrown into a chill by long exposure to the icy winds. For him, therefore, to walk through snow and cold to Abbottsville whenever the exigency should arise was impossible. But it was equally impossible to leave him alone at home. The Witch feared to do so since she had learned what might come of it; and as for Jim, the very thought of

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being left by himself in the cottage was now so fraught with terror that the mere idea caused him almost as much fright as if his late captors had presented themselves bodily before him.

There was nothing for it then but to essay the trip in concert. This was done, but, on the third occasion, encountering a heavy wind on the way home, Jim reached the cottage so chilled and exhausted that the Witch was afraid to expose him thus again, and she herself felt an extreme weariness. The only one of the party who appeared perfectly fresh and cheerful was John o' Partletts'. He enjoyed the whole performance from beginning to end, and trotted up the hill in the teeth of the rising gale as hardily and quickly as if it were no more than blown thistledown. He was encumbered too, for the packages and bundles being numerous, the Witch had given a share to the strongest of the party, which manœuvre she had accomplished by making a strong sort of woollen bag as wide as the dog's deep chest, and this

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was attached around his neck, and further strengthened by a remarkable array of straps which went over his shoulders and under his fore-arms. It was decidedly a strange contraption, and quite like the Witch to make it of size, shape and color which defied all appearances.

John o' Partletts' had no shame in wearing it, however. His mistress assured him that it made him most useful, and that he was rendering her a valuable service, and, if he did not comprehend her exact words, he fully understood the gist of them, and more than all, he understood the meaning in her eyes when she informed him of these things. And he wore his outlandish equipment, which, by the way, had been made out of an old, flowered sofa cover, with quite an air of pride, as if he were honorably ornamented, and most willingly bore whatever burdens were packed and tied about him.

Seeing him bear himself so cheerfully thus laden, a further idea occurred to the Witch. Why not let John o' Partletts' go down alone

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for the supplies? He could make frequent trips, thus never be heavily burdened, and in this way her dilemma about Jim would be entirely surmounted. She had not the slightest fear but that she could make the dog understand her wishes; and he could make his trip — not along the Abbottsville turnpike — but along a track leading through a quiet strip of woods, which opened out almost directly behind Mr. Finn's store, as it stood on the outskirts of Abbottsville. After a little further thought she resolved to try it.

It was a success! A success from every point of view, especially the dog's. The great beast felt his importance. When the time came to go he was always expectant and ready.

Hence could be seen the unique spectacle of an enormous animal, strangely caparisoned, trotting into Abbottsville, on frequent occasions, and into the store of Mr. Finn; which gentleman would receive his visitor with many remarks and commendations as to his sagacity; feel in the bag of many col-

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ors for a paper which contained the list of articles required; fill the bag with said articles; adjust the wonderful arrangement of straps, which at first had been puzzling — but a careful study on the part of Mr. Finn had elucidated the problem — and out would go John o' Partletts' to push through the amused and staring spectators on the sidewalk, turn a corner, traverse an empty lot or two, plunge again into the woods and the little wood-track for home.

A wondering customer, one day, observing Mr. Finn take a bill from the dog's bag, count up the value of the purchases, and replace some change, exclaimed:

"Money, too! You receive and send money?"

"Everything," exclaimed Mr. Finn triumphantly, as if it were a device of his own ingenuity, "goes and comes by that dog! And what, let me ask you, could be safer? For his part, we know he's honest! And —" laughing as the dog's great bulk filled the entrance to the shop, and some incoming cus-

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tomers backed away hastily — "look at him! Who'd tackle him, do you think, eh?"

And so John o' Partletts' became recognized in Abbottsville as a useful member of society. Mr. Finn bragged of him to all comers. He told how he served the lonely old woman and sickly child, and when the big dog made his appearance in the street more than one person stepped aside — more in deference than in fear — and more than one voice called out right heartily to him that he was a fine fellow!

And far up on Partletts' the old Witch and Jim, listening to the rising wind, would talk of "Marse Johnny;" figure what portion of the road he had reached, and listen, as dusk gathered, for his quick scratch and whine at the door.

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CHAPTER XX

JOHN O' PARTLETTS' IN THE DARK VALLEY

ONE'S fame is never confined to the ears of one's friends. If such were the case this pleasant state of affairs might have gone on for long and John o' Partletts' continued his trips indefinitely.

But Gus Schaftsmire also went regularly into Abbottsville to receive the supplies for his father's shop, and before long he heard of the big dog, and at length, being in the vicinity of Mr. Finn's store, caught a glimpse of him.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed, "so it's *you*, is it? An' ain't that the most ridiculous sight!" he guffawed.

But those about him not seeming to see so much humor in the situation, he subdued his mirth, scratched his ear thoughtfully, and, driving back to Partlettsville, spread

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the news of what he had seen, which was received there with plenty of amusement and comment.

"An' you know," said Gus with the peculiar whine that always came into his voice when his feelings were hurt, "it *ain't* very pleasant now, is it, to hear the big brute praised, knowin' what I know about him? An' him marchin' round, all importance, while I got the mark of his teeth in my leg this minute!"

And, incensing himself by a still further recollection of his injuries, he reverted to his original opinion, expressed many a time concerning John when he was John Frenchy.

"He'd ought to have a load o' lead in him anyway, that's what he'd ought to have! But, strange thing," he added, "I never meet him on the Abbottsville turnpike; I guess," finished Gus, in his braggadocio way, "he and I'd have come to conclusions if I had!"

"Oh, most like," suggested Kitty Merryweather, "she sends 'im some private way

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of 'er own; some back track through the woods!"

"Most like she does!" exclaimed Gus. "An' just there you give me an idea! Just there you set me to thinkin'!"

"Thinkin' about what?" asked Kitty, laughing. "Don't overwork that head-piece of yours, Gussie; you know it ain't over strong!"

"Just wait," replied Gus, "till I get it all straight in my own mind, an' I'll acquaint you with the details. An idea's occurred to me, that's all!" And again he scratched his ear and lounged away, an unusually thoughtful expression on his florid face.

After this, for several weeks, Gus was secret, and very quiet. His favorite haunts knew him no more; he was seldom found hanging about the main street; kept very sober, and even his customary potations of beer being neglected at the little Partlettsville saloon, the bartender was constrained to inquire:

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"What's become of Gussie? What's he up to, these days?"

As for that young man, he was continually finding excuses to go over to Abbottsville. He no longer complained that the road was tedious, nor that it was hard a fellow should be expected to spend his life driving a cart and nag from one town to the next. And instead of reappearing, as in old times, at the shop in a marvellously short space of time, his horse in a lather, his load shaken up with the haste of the journey, he seldom reached home before dark; and his irate father complained now as much of tardiness as, in times past, he had lamented his senseless and rash speed.

Willie Merryweather was seen to be partner upon these lone excursions, and, had any one been at the other end of the route, the two would have been observed dodging about the woods that skirted Abbottsville, watching and peeping, and when they returned to Partlettsville they usually met again in the evening in Kitty's kitchen, where they held

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a sort of session, to which were admitted Michaelson and others.

Various mysterious allusions would then be made, such as from Gus:

"It would best be pulled off somewhere not too near Abbottsville. You see, them folks over there ain't any too good friends of mine!"

"Oh, let it come off somewhere near her own 'ouse," Kitty would break in. "It would give her a good scare, and make her see what she kin expect, an' that she ain't so independent of us!"

"Mayhap it would cause her take a fright an' clear out before the Deacon turns her out," suggested Michaelson.

The Witch had lately begun to feel more and more anxious about John o' Partletts' when he was off on his errands. Perhaps one reason for this was that lately, when the dog returned, he came rushing up in a great hurry with a worried and furtive expression, and during the whole evening, as he lay by

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the fire, would start and growl in his sleep as if alarmed or disconcerted.

"Why, what's the matter, John?" she would exclaim, looking at him when he raised his head, as if to read an answer in his eyes.

Her anxiety communicated itself to Jim, and soon it came about that neither of them could do anything when John was gone but listen for his return. Yet, neither wished to alarm the other. Jim would loiter near the window, pretending to be idly looking out, but in reality, watching. And the Witch, if she heard a noise, would raise her head with a sudden start, and then lower it again, as if she had merely jerked it in harmony with the tune she was humming.

One afternoon — it was now late in January — John had departed on his errand. He had been long gone. Dusk closed in and the kitchen lamp was lighted. Jim and the old Witch occasionally glanced at the clock, then at each other, but neither spoke. Black darkness fell outside. Suppertime arrived. The fire in the kitchen stove required brighten-

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ing, and Jim stepped down into the wood-shed to get an extra armful of wood; he left the kitchen door open behind him, but he did not return through it, for, at the moment he stepped into the wood-shed, something happened.

In the meantime John o' Partletts' had gone to Mr. Finn's store, got his parcels and his change, and was returning. As the early dusk fell, he trotted along the wood path briskly, his fierce little eyes glancing from side to side with a suspicious expression.

At a certain spot where the wood was very dense he slowed up and glanced toward the road; there stood a horse and cart; he had seen them there frequently, also two figures lurking in their vicinity; but this time he did not see the figures! This was why he paused. He knew they were there, he *felt* them! With rising bristles he glanced about him, and then instinctively, glanced straight up. It was dark now, and by the human eye nothing could be seen but the densely woven

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branches, black against the blackness of the winter sky. But the animal eyes saw something more; they saw figures, not two, but many, crouching motionless; and eyes, human eyes, all looking downward toward him, and filled with a certain definite intent.

John o' Partletts' never paused. Perhaps he remembered that day when something bright had flashed out at him, and he had been so mysteriously stung with a terrible pain; perhaps he felt, instinctively, his inevitable helplessness against his enemies thus at close range. At any rate, he wheeled, and, quicker than thought, went galloping like mad, straight through the underbrush, for the Abbottsville turnpike. Lowering his great head, he smashed and tore through the thick dried branches and vines. In scarce an instant he was gone, — out of sight, and only the rumble and crackling, as he rushed on, told of his passage through the lonely wood.

Those left behind had not had time to act.

"Tricked again!" came a voice from the branches; it was Michaelson's.

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"No — not on your life!" cried another, Gus Schaftsmire's. "We're out to get him, an' we'll do it! Follow me!" Gus' voice was fairly shaking. He was the quickest, the most inventive, and daring of them all, and the others slid down the tree in obedience to his command.

There was a run for the wagon, which had been left, not on the turnpike, but on an old wood road, long in disuse, called the English road, which ran between the dog's wood track and the Abbottsville turnpike. The English had made it in Revolutionary times, and, to judge by appearances, it had neither been repaired nor used much since.

Gus leaped into the seat while the others scrambled aboard, and took up the reins.

"Good Lord, Gussie!" cried out Kitty Merryweather — she had been seated in the wagon all the while, watching through a hole in the canvas to see the fun — "have a care for us, do! Oh, Lord! Ain't you the crazy head, though!"

For the wagon leaped and bounded, now

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on three wheels, now on two, over rocks, logs and drifted snow, at the most astounding rate, while Gus encouraged his horse to a yet faster pace.

"We got to head him off!" he explained. "He's goin' along the Abbottsville turnpike; but I guess I know the spot where his Highness is bound to come out,—near the top of Partletts'. We got to nab him there!"

"Near the top of Partletts'!" repeated Kitty. "What—in plain sight o' the old woman's 'ouse?"

"What do you suppose I care for that?" shouted back Gussie, holding on to the swaying vehicle, and looking at the others. "I come out here to git him, an' I'm goin' to git him, this time! Go along there, will you?" he cried, again leaning over the straining horse.

What happened while Jim was in the woodshed was this.

A cry came to his ears, wild, hoarse, between a howl and a bellow; it had fright in

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it, surprise, terror, and appeal, and, right in the middle, as it reached a crescendo, it was suddenly choked off, and a dead silence followed.

Jim listened, frozen by the sound for a moment. The next he had thrown open the outer door. From the distance came voices, and something that sounded like a moan, but not in a human tone! And then Jim, shrinking, timid little Jim, was outside of the wood-shed, in the open, the biggest stick he could snatch in his hand, screaming at the top of his voice!

"Mis' Beevish, Mis' Beevish! Somebody's got Marse Johnny!" And he was rushing toward the sound of those voices, and that faint other sound, as if he were a whole army, a veritable troop of cavalry in himself. In truth, had any one seen his little, black face at this moment, there would have appeared no fear in it. It was ablaze with frantic excitement. Marse Johnny had helped him once, and now — it was Jim's turn now!

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The old Witch needed no second call, no repeated warning. At the sound of the first cry she was on her feet. She threw open the window to hear the better, and the icy wind rushed in, also the sound of those voices in the distance. Her face whitened, and, turning, she glanced about her with blazing eyes; they fell upon a knife that lay upon the table near her, and catching it up, she rushed out into the night, without stopping to protect herself from the cold, muttering and gesticulating with raised arms.

The snow lay deep on the ground and was glazed over, the night being bitterly cold. The moon had risen, and was just above the tree-tops, brightening the great hollow of the vast star-lit sky, and casting a clear light upon the white ground.

The old woman came abreast of Jim, but neither spoke; they ran, swift as shadows, and as silent.

She passed the boy, slipped, fell, and he was on ahead, not pausing to look back; but the next instant, with wonderful quickness,

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she had regained her feet and had taken the lead. So they ran, nearer to the voices, nearer to that low, strange moaning. And then the voices ceased, and the moaning also, and all was silence. Little Jim, listening in vain for a repetition of its sound, fluttered his hands with a gesture of helpless despair as he ran, but he never abated his speed for one second; and the old woman never paused. Until, suddenly, they both stood, as by one impulse, still and panting.

They had reached the brow of the hill and were looking down.

Directly before them, about forty paces down the side of the steep slope, stood a thick clump of tall chestnut trees, their branches inextricably interwoven, and from one of these hung a dark, heavy form; the wind slightly swayed it, and a faint, convulsive shudder passed through it from head to foot, as if it were the last tremor of life; and then it hung stiff and motionless; only the gale swung it slightly sidewise, ruffling the heavy, coarse hair that stood out stiffly as if

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it had bristled thus at the moment of danger and surprise.

The Witch was at the base of the tree, knowing not how she had gained it, how she had traversed the space that separated her from it, — knowing only one thing, that she could not reach the body, nor the rope by which it hung! She dropped her head on her hands, and then another realization came to her; — those who had done this were still within call! And she cried out in a voice in which there was no anger nor violence, only the most beseeching entreaty:

"Is there no one here who will help me?"

In all the wood there was silence as if not a creature moved or heard.

But just at her elbow she could hear, for the second time in her life, a very small voice, saying words the most welcome to her ear:

"Mis' Beevish, I is here!"

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CHAPTER XXI

A GLIMPSE OF SPRING

How little Jim scrambled into the tree, cut the rope which bound the great dog with the knife the old Witch thrust into his hand, how John o' Partletts' body fell with a thud to the ground, how they got him home, and whether dead or alive, — it did not belong to the Partlettsville folk to know; for, at the first sound of the old woman's voice, they scurried away through the underbrush, no one wishing to be recognized and identified.

Days passed, and weeks, and those who had entrapped him on that January night were entirely satisfied that he was safely dead and buried. "Under the lilacs!" remarked Gus with a smile. For they knew that he had been wounded. Two of them had had "a go" at him, and both shots had taken effect.

Indeed it goes without saying that John o'

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Partletts' was badly wounded before any man among them dared put a rope about his neck, and tie him to a tree!

But dead he was not! — as any one passing the Witch's cottage on bright afternoons in late February could have testified. There he might have been seen sitting in the sun, or walking up and down, slightly lame, it is true, but otherwise apparently strong and hearty.

It was the choir children who finally took this news down to Partlettsville. They reported that they had seen the big dog, though, as Partletts' was forbidden ground for them, they were careful not to mention where.

The Witch's grief and rage over the whole affair were mingled with self-reproach. She could not forgive herself for exposing a faithful friend to such a danger, and she remarked to Jim:

"He'll never go on another errand, — I'll starve first!"

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But starvation was not practicable; she therefore did something almost as painful as that alternative to her nature. She lowered her pride.

Never — at least since she had come into this part of the world — had she asked a favor of any one. It is safe to say she would not have received a favor had it been freely offered her. But now she was forced to ask and receive.

It was said that she quite broke down, when, in Mr. Finn's store, she told him of what had occurred and was forced to ask him to help her out of her difficulties. There were tears in her voice, and in her eyes, when she related how her messenger had been served; and she, who had always striven to be independent and self-reliant, spoke of herself as a friendless old woman.

Mr. Finn expressed sympathy and regret at losing John o' Partletts' for a customer: "As polite and well behaved as any who came into my store, Ma'm!" But more than sympathy and compliments, he gave his

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promise that he would send provisions over the three miles to Partletts'. In those days tradesmen never thought of sending distances, and this was indeed a favor!

Consequently, after this, at stated intervals, a horse and wagon could be seen breaking the long untrodden snow line on the steep slope of Partletts', bearing, through the rigid, bitter season, the necessities of life to the three in their lonely isolation on the hill top.

The old woman seen in Mr. Finn's store would scarcely be recognized as the one who, a few days later, met Gus Schaftsmire and Michaelson on the high road. Deeply wounded as she was, — far more deeply than had they taken their revenge upon her own person — she was about to pass them in silence; but they could not resist taunting her, and she stopped at length to answer their taunts in kind, when who should come stalking toward them, bent on his parochial rounds, but the "Maister" himself. Tall,

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judicial, self-contained, he paused to listen to the Witch's reproaches, which were incisive enough, once she was well started, and especially since she perceived him as audience. Michaelson and Gus were wise enough to cease their snickering and grimacing, and they even managed to assume expressions of innocence and surprise.

Suddenly Mr. Carruthers turned to them, and pointed along the road.

"Pass on, don't stop here!" he said in his authoritative manner. And when Gus and Michaelson, triumphant and amused, were out of ear-shot, he turned to the old woman.

"I am not at all surprised," he remarked in his grave, confident voice, "at your making a commotion in a public place, because I have heard of your doing so before! I understand that it is of a mishap to your dog you are speaking, and I have not a doubt that your accusations are wild. And, even if they are not, your appearance certainly is! It seems very far from commendable

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that you should berate your fellow-men in defence of an animal! Surely you do not put a soulless brute above human beings?"

The Witch looked at him for a full half-minute. Her lips were trembling, and so was her throat, as if with a torrent of words which her emotion checked her from uttering. But when she spoke it was quietly:

"And who made him, then, — my soulless brute? Perhaps, Henry Carruthers, you can tell me! — that he should be at the mercy of my fellow-creatures to ill-treat and abuse as they please?" And she passed on without another word, along her lonely way to the steep ascent of Partletts', looking sad, grave, and more broken than ever before.

But Spring was now again blessing the land! Even in this part of the world, where she showed her face with more than her proverbial coyness — even here, in spite of all her vagaries, her presence was felt, — felt in the warm sunshine, and the lengthening days. And there were evidences of her in

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the brightening skies, and in quick-fleeing March birds.

Wiseacres, however, shook their heads. For the ground was still frozen, the nights continued cold, and streams wore their thick winter coating of ice.

It was not until a certain day in March that the temperature sprang up. Then, as if by magic, the ground seemed to melt underfoot, evergreens appeared vivid, the sunshine was proclaimed as hot; and beneath the ice, the waters, released from a hundred high sources, could be heard tinkling and surging against their yet tenacious ice covering.

With the enthusiasm of the season, people walked with lighter, quicker steps. In Partlettsville cheerful, and even gay, greetings were exchanged. Old Elsa, looking out from the Rectory kitchen at the flooding sunshine, yielded at length to little Margy's oft repeated entreaties that she be allowed to go with her brothers and sisters to choir practice.

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And that small person, much too enthusiastic to contain quietly such an amount of pleasant expectation, went jumping about the big kitchen on her toes, pretending to clap her hands, and making motions with her rosy little mouth as if she were shouting, though not a sound came forth; — for Father was in the house and must not be disturbed!

And the grave man, shut up in his study and glancing from his window, saw the darting birds and brightness, too; and for a moment stood looking out at them with something hungry and wistful in his eyes. But he turned from them with a sigh, and seating himself at his desk, continued writing upon a discourse in which this world was set forth most uncompromisingly as a Vale of Tears.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE STORM

Of course on such a day the Witch was out in her garden. The happy moment had arrived when she could begin Spring work upon it, and she and Jim were scraping around the roots of the shrubs, pruning dead branches, tying up live ones, while John o' Partletts', stretching, and blinking his little eyes, strolled after in his own enjoyment of the occasion.

Very early in the afternoon the Sunday school children went by, — more hastily than usual, because the old woman and the dog were out. The Witch, shading her eyes, looked at them with her customary intentness.

All the children of Partlettsville were there this afternoon. Willie Merryweather

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in the fore, and plump, petted Eva Sawrey in the rear. Mittens and mufflers had been discarded, and they made a gay little procession, some bareheaded, swinging their hats and caps as they walked.

And there, too, was little Margy Carruthers, the smallest and merriest of all. The most fearless, too, for, seeing the old Witch, she waved her hand, and when the old woman returned the salutation, nodded her head until her yellow curls fairly jigged to and fro with the readiness and heartiness of her response.

Then Jim and the Witch returned to their work, forgetting the passage of time; yes, and even to eat, so great was their interest and enthusiasm.

It was not until the afternoon was waning that the old woman finally looked about her and exclaimed:

"Dark coming already, Jim!"

Jim straightened himself and looked up, too. But it was not the dark coming. The sun was shrouded under heavy clouds, and,

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as they spoke, a chill wind swept up from the ocean.

"A sea change!" decided the Witch.

They went into the house and there found that the clock marked only half-past three.

Now, the Witch being an enthusiast, her wish to finish tying up her shrubs on this very day was supreme. She therefore decided to leave Jim with John o' Partletts', and go down to Partlettsville to purchase the necessary heavy twine; a proceeding which should not take over thirty minutes.

She was surprised, when she opened the kitchen door, at the rate at which the wind blew, and at the heavy, steel-black clouds which were piling up in the sky.

It was cold, too! She drew her old mantle about her and tied her red headdress firmly.

"The wind has changed! Shut the house tight and keep indoors, Jim!" she called back, and the next minute had reached the top of the hill and was out of sight over its brow, on the road to Partlettsville.

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She walked as swiftly as she might with the wind in her face and pelting her at every step; but, being an enthusiast, and a very hardy one, she had not the slightest notion of turning back.

She reached Louisa Myers' little store, the only one in Partlettsville that she would enter, for, when in her shop, Louisa was always extremely polite; the thrifty German allowed neither her own temper nor personal feeling to interfere with trade. "Shop manners!" as Kitty Merryweather said disdainfully; and once when that short-sighted person had advised the quarrelling with, and ejection of, a certain impertinent customer, Louisa had replied with a sage shaking of her big blond head: "Oh, yes, quarrel! Push her out of der shop! All very well for *you* to say, but mit *me* it is business first and pleasure after!"

The Witch was, therefore, received urbanely, the twine bought, and a little conversation thrown in for good measure.

"A great changement in the weather!"

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remarked Louisa. "And all der children over to Abbottsville! Mrs. Sawrey's twice been down the road looking for Evey, but there's no expecting dem yet, — not before half-past five!"

The Witch scarce replied — she wasted no words on any Partlettsvillite — and turned to open the door. In an instant she had all she could do to hold it in her hand, for the wind whistled in a gale, and Louisa threw herself over her counter and held on to it as if she were afraid it would blow away.

And now, back up to Partletts', this time with the wind behind. But before she had gone ten paces it was doing as it pleased with her. It snatched off her old mantle and whirled it; threw her partly to her knees, and when she recovered and staggered forward again, took her stout, solid form and sent it running, her wide blue cotton skirts spreading about her like sails. Of course it did not occur to her to return and see perchance if the gale would pass over, — her one thought was to get back to the cottage

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and Jim. It was not until she was half-way up the hill that another thought came to her.

The children! If she could scarcely stand before this, how were they to face it? At the thought she turned her own face toward it for a moment.

The clouds were racing up toward the middle sky, heavier and denser; the wind smelt of cold; and, on the instant, stinging into her face, came hard, icy particles of sleet. She shut her eyes against them, and moved forward. This was no passing gale, but a storm!

As she hurried on she recalled how she had seen the children pass in the sunshine three hours before, lightly clad. They would have left Abbottsville half an hour ago now, and be on their road, perhaps just ascending Partletts'.

Ascending Partletts'! Why, she was the only person who knew where they were! Who, if any mischance befell, could tell of their whereabouts! For well she divined

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that their passing over Partletts' was a secret kept from parents and friends.

"Oh, that they may go by the high road to-day!" she thought.

But no! Childlike, thinking it the quickest route, they would be more likely than ever to take the hill, in spite of its greater exposure. And who was the oldest, supposedly most responsible one among them? Willie Merryweather, a poltroon and coward!

Before she had reached home the sleet was like a veil, blurring familiar objects and covering the ground with its icy particles, making the walking difficult. But she did not turn in at her cottage. Passing it, and groping on, her head covered with her mantle, she reached the barn, caught up all the harness and straps that had belonged with her old equipage, and then made her way back to the house.

Jim and John o' Partletts' were in the kitchen, the lamp lighted, for though it was scarcely five o'clock the storm had brought with it black darkness.

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The instant Jim looked at the old woman's set, white face and blazing eyes he knew that something more than the elements had moved her. But, as for her, she looked at John o' Partletts' and:

"John man, I've work for you to do!" she said grimly.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE SEARCH

THEN she sat down and unwound all the twine, which she doubled, twisted, and bound with as strong a rope as possible, cutting up the leather harness and straps to supplement it; afterwards adding all the rope and all the strong cloth that could hastily be found about the house, stripping this up and binding it.

Her intentions she explained to Jim in a few words, and when her arrangements were ready she called John o' Partletts' and fastened the leather portion securely about his broad chest and shoulders. The rope she passed once around her own waist; the short end was attached to the dog's impromptu harness, and all the long end, of many yards, she gathered up carefully and looped over her arm. Then lighting two lanterns, one of

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which she tied to the dog's collar, the other to the rope at her waist, and wrapping herself in a heavy shawl, which she securely pinned and tied, she was ready to start.

But Jim, who had silently left the room a few moments before, now reappeared swathed in all his winter clothes, and with a bright red comforter which he had taken off his bed, wrapped over his head and ears, and fastened about his small person with the aid of a mighty number of safety-pins.

The Witch looked at this apparition sternly.

"Jim!" she commanded, "take off those things! You are not going out!"

Then Jim, for the first time, rolling his eyes, looked at the Witch defiantly.

"Mis' Beevish, I *is*," he declared. "Ef I goes out wid you-all I kin stand it! But ef you leaves me here alone in de house wid dis here storm I is sure die ob de fright!"

The Witch being a person to whom the sufferings of the spirit were quite as present as those of the flesh, said not another

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word. She quickly untied the rope about her waist and put the boy in her place, tying herself behind him, thus placing him in the safest position, between herself and the great dog. Then, putting out the lamp, she opened the door.

The light from their lanterns shone upon a wild slither of wind and snow. John o' Partletts' raised his head, sniffed the air, and stepped forward. And the other two followed him out into the icy blackness of the night.

The Witch had no need for any one to point her way; silently she took it, around the curve of the little garden, forward for about fifty paces, and then down the steep, narrow wood-track toward the Abbottsville turnpike.

On this steep space she expected to find the children. Confused by the wind and drifting snow, they might have wandered off the direct path; in that case she trusted to the light of the lanterns, hallooing, and the sagacity of the dog to find them.

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And all this while, heard by her, for the wind drove straight up from Partlettsville, came the harsh, doleful clang of iron upon iron. Down there they were organizing search parties and calling the men together, as they did at times of fire, by the old-fashioned method of striking upon a great semi-circular iron hoop that hung in the main street for this purpose. She knew that such parties would infallibly go along the high-road, therefore they could not possibly connect with the children. On her efforts and those of John o' Partletts' depended their safety — perhaps their lives!

Each moment told her that she had not exaggerated the danger. The wind drove forward, and in the swirling white mist she endeavored vainly to keep her bearings. But the dog, with powerful plunges, went on, and in the dimness, from time to time, some familiar form of rock or tree told her that they were still on the right path.

The snow was drifting heavily now. How they were to return through it, with the wind

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leaping at their faces, the Witch did not know — but still they struggled on. "The children!" she kept reiterating; "the children, John man!"

Occasionally she would pause, halloo aloud, and wave her lantern, but its light shed only a feeble ray through the white chaos, and her call, the moment it left her lips, was borne away and smothered in the shrill voice of the blast.

The thought of the helpless children was so strong upon her that she groaned aloud. "If only they keep together!" she murmured. But perhaps already they were a scattered band, each battling his own way. In that case, what suffering and helpless bewilderment for the weaker ones! Little Margy Carruthers' golden head, shaking in merry, friendly salutation, came before her; through the whirling darkness it beckoned her and she seemed again to see the sweet, affectionate, undimmed eyes looking at her beneath the curls: "No, darling!" she muttered, setting her teeth, and pushing on;

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" you shall not suffer here! No, lamb — no, you shall not! "

In the meantime a furiously driven cart had passed along the high road; a lantern waved from it, and voices shouted. In it sat Deacon Sawrey, pale, huddled up in the straw that had been hastily thrown into it, and silent. And with him were others, men and women, too. They also were pale, and wore expressions more and more distracted. Gus Schaftsmire was driving, his services, horse, and wagon having been hurriedly hired. Along the road they rushed, the wind behind them. Two, three miles were traversed, and the Abbottsville church reached. But it was silent — not a light gleamed. Into the town of Abbottsville, then, to make inquiries; at last to find a responsible person and to hear that the children had left long ago — an hour and a half ago, when it seemed that the storm was but a passing gust. And they had gone along the road to Partlettsville; they had been seen to start

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— they must be along that road somewhere, now!

Back again then, more slowly, and with more frequent shouting, with more distracted faces, and alarm increasing. How they could have missed their way upon the highroad was a mystery. It was lonely, bordered by fields and orchards, but walls and fences marked the length of it. The dreadful certainty that, in spite of this, the children had wandered off somehow, became more and more apparent. They gazed into the white chaos about them, patiently raising the lantern at every step, and shouting; but nothing was revealed — no answer came.

Now an approaching light flashed, accompanied by the jingle of sleigh-bells, and strained, anxious voices cried out for the news.

This was a fresh party just starting out from Partlettsville, where nothing had been heard, and not a child had arrived. In the front seat, driving the pair of horses, sitting very erect, his pale but determined face

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looking boldly out into the night, was Henry Carruthers himself. He had left a home desolate and silent enough, — every one of his eight children was out of it! His eyes flashed through the darkness, as he asked the curt question:

"Nothing heard?"

"Nothing, sir!" cried out Gus Schaftsmire. The big horses felt the whip, and the sleigh shot out of sight.

Deacon Sawrey stood up in the back of the cart, crying:

"Turn, follow him!"

And Gus silently turned his horse's head again, and sped after the sound of the bells.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE RESCUE

As they rushed, in a kind of hopeless haste, through the whirling darkness, listening to the noisy bells in front, suddenly the sound of those bells ceased with a vehement jingle as the horses threw back their heads, being brought to a sudden stop.

Across a narrow, steep chasm, from a little hut on the far side, a voice hailed them. It was hoarse and harsh as it sounded through the driving wind; it was echoed by a deep, bellowing bark, and the next instant, from out the hut, dimly seen through the white mist, came the gleam of a lantern.

"Who are you? What do you wish?" Henry Carruthers's clear, strong voice sounded across the little stream that ran between the steep banks, separating them,

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and he sprang out of the sleigh, holding the reins in his hand, as he stood on the bank, waiting for the answer. It came:

"Cross the bridge! Come over! Your children are here!"

In that moment of relief no one paused even to speak.

In a breath every one was out of the two vehicles, and the horses were tied. The little bridge stood two paces beyond, crossing the stream which ran at the base of Partletts'. The moment they had crossed it the wind seemed to cease; the big hill sheltered them. The wild storm whirled over the highroad, but here was comparative peace. And there, in the little hut before them, stood a figure holding a lantern aloft, a great, burly head pushed out beside it coated with snow, a strange little form, swathed in a bright, red counterpane which had come unloosed and was hanging bedraggled, leaned, panting inside the doorway; and beyond were faces, — a group of small, pinched faces, wild-eyed and pale.

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Then came cries of joy and of recognition. The children ran out of the hut, and the anxious searchers each looked for the face so dear, that they had believed lost.

And none looked in vain; all were here! Kitty Merryweather, her Maggie under one arm, and her Willie's red head clasped to her breast, shed the most grateful tears of her life; and Willie, all the hypocrite and bully shocked out of him, threw his arms about her neck, and clung there, crying:

"Oh, Mother! Mother!"

After came the explanations, how the Witch, or, rather, John o' Partletts', — for she had left all to his sagacity, only following him, — had found them crouched behind a boulder, slightly protected by it, but in the very path of the storm, beaten by it, while the drift rose ever higher about them, afraid to venture on, forgetting in the blackness and cold even the point in the path they had reached and not knowing which way to turn. How she had tied them all firmly into her long rope, and putting the dog in front, and

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herself in the rear, had kept them all together, and brought them here; for she had remembered this little abandoned hut by the stream, and knowing they could never reach her cottage on the top of Partletts' had felt that, if necessary, they could endure here through the night.

But her strongest hope had been through all that some searching party would find them; and so it had come about.

Then there was wonder how the children could so have lost their way upon the turnpike, and wandered up to Partletts'! It was no time for deception of any sort. The truth was instantly blurted out. They always went that way! Indeed, they knew it was very wrong — but it had become their regular route!

If it was the time for confession it was the time also for ready forgiveness. And perhaps it can be understood that there was no relaxing of the affectionate embraces that clasped these too venturesome wanderers.

But one face here changed at this revela-

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tion. As they stood in a close group, sheltered from the storm, on the one side by the hut, on the other by the great hill, with the light of the lanterns full upon their faces, something unwonted and gentle could be seen to pass from Henry Carruthers' eyes; their stern, smouldering look returned, while they slowly and definitely sought those of his eldest son. The boy, guilty and conscious, was already looking at his father's face, and, in the midst of all the tenderness and affection that was surrounding them, their eyes met with a kind of shock.

"You have disobeyed me!" commented the man.

"Yes, father," said the panting boy; "I know I have! But all went the other way, and I — we did not want to go alone by the lower road."

"You have been deliberately disobeying me for months," came the steady, implacable voice. "You are older than your brothers and sisters and I shall hold you responsible!" His lips slightly tightened, and the

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boy's face, already pale, turned a shade whiter.

There was no question, of course, of the minister punishing the child here, but his face, and the look the two exchanged, spoke eloquently of what would come hereafter.

After that short dialogue, which was distinctly spoken and heard by all, a dead silence fell.

But only for a moment. For the next it was broken by a short, piercing scream.

Little Margy Carruthers had been standing beside her brother and he had held her hand in his, but when he turned to speak to his father he unconsciously released the little fingers, and the child, seeing her father's stern glance bent upon them, stepped back without looking behind. She was near the edge of the steep bank; in an instant she had gone over it, down twelve, fifteen feet to the stream below; the ice, weakened by the warmth of the preceding day, cracked, gave way; — the bright, golden head showed for

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an instant against the black water, and then, carried on the stream by its swift flow, disappeared beneath the yet unbroken ice further down.

In the cry of terror that followed and the frightened rush to the edge of the bank the minister was before all. No one had ever impugned his courage, and he intended to take that leap, though he could swim but little. Only, for a moment, he paused, raising his lantern high, glancing along the bridge for the best spot for springing off.

But there was one among them who neither hesitated nor paused. Before Henry Carruthers could draw himself together, before the first cry of surprise and terror had died away, there was a rush, a great form sprang outward from the bank, for an instant it seemed almost to hang in the air, and then it descended; there was a splash, a churning up of the black water, and John o' Partletts' head arose, glistening in almost the very spot where the little girl's golden curls had disappeared a moment before.

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Then began a struggle which none who saw ever forgot.

The dog began to work and fight his way along the stream, smashing the ice with powerful strokes of his fore-feet, sometimes almost lying over it in order to keep himself from being borne under it by the swirling, rushing water. The stream, a mere runlet all Winter, was now swollen, the effect of the past few hours of thaw being to send the water rushing into it from all its sources with a vehemence that bore the great dog's body forward swiftly, threatening every moment to rush it into the darkness and silence under that veil of ice where the child was already gone.

No man, however strong of body, however powerful of will, could have done what the great beast was doing now — smash a track for himself — with that pitiless current tearing at him. But the dog struck and battered with bleeding paws, and, after each effort, flung his head upward with tremendous strength.

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All along the bank a score of lanterns moved in company with his progress, shedding their light down into that cavern of darkness. Voices were hushed, only an awe-struck whisper, or exclamation, could be heard now and then; but every eye was strained for a glimpse of that huge, fearsome, glistening head, as if the very world hung upon its movements.

Henry Carruthers, seeing the animal struggling desperately in the black water, in search of his lost child, would have sprung after to aid him, utterly futile though such an effort must have been, but a strong, detaining hand was laid on him.

"What can *you* do! Stand back." It was the Witch's voice, and it continued, full of its accustomed vehemence and feeling:

"Just now, you thought only of punishing your son! If you had taken your daughter into your arms instead this would not have happened!" The hand held him, and the unsparing voice went on:

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"When you go to her who left them to you, account to her for this!"

It was a terrible taunt to throw at him at such a moment! The man's white face grew whiter; he looked at her as if she had struck a blow straight to his heart, and he slightly staggered and leaned against the doorway of the little hut, covering his face with his hands, and behind those sheltering hands he whispered passionately:

"Oh, God! Oh. my God!"

At that instant there was a cry.

The dog had disappeared. His whole body had gone down, out of sight beneath the pitiless covering of ice near the bank. A few breathless seconds and the black waters were churning again. They thought that, exhausted, he had been submerged; but he had dived, and now his great head reared, and in his mouth he bore the little figure, which he had torn out from among clutching roots and branches.

There was another cry; this time of hope

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"'ONE MORE STROKE, OLD MAN! BRING HER IN!'"

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and encouragement. A score of hands reached out; a score of voices, loosed from the silence and anguish of suspense, shouted; and Gus Schaftsmire, stretching out over the dark water while the animal, burdened by the weight of the child, made painfully toward the bank, was crying out:

"One more stroke, old man! Bring her in!"

Then he burst into a shout of frenzied enthusiasm, for the rough head was under his hand, the snorting nostrils in his face.

It seemed as if nothing so fragile and delicate could come alive out of that black death-water. But the child lived! She lay breathing in her father's arms, her drenched, golden hair scattered over his shoulder. They snatched her from him to take her into the shelter of the hut, but he had felt her stir, had seen the flicker of life pass over her closed lids and with a bursting heart and all unnerved he dropped upon his knees.

John o' Partletts' walked over to the old woman. She looked into his eyes with the

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words: "Ah, John man!" That was all, but how intensely spoken! And they remained, drawn apart from the others, ignoring their applause, alone, as they had always been, and wished to be.

The minister's voice broke a long silence. In trembling tones he spoke broken words of thanks. All took them up.

But the old woman appeared not to hear. Picking up her harness and long rope, she began looping them over her arm, her hawk face set and half averted.

"You have given me back all that I prize on earth!" It was Henry Carruthers's voice, speaking in tones lower, less confident than had ever been heard before; "I do thank you, — I — "

But she turned and stopped him.

"What are you thanking me for?" she cried out proudly. "Your child has been saved from a terrible death because there was just one creature here that had the strength and the ability — and, more than that — the courage and the heart to do it!

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That was not I — it was no man nor woman among us!" She pointed to the panting dog beside her, and threw back her head with a vehement gesture of something like triumph. "It was the soulless brute! It is to him that you owe all!"

He met her meaning glance, and in his eyes, slowly, painfully, dawned a look of humility.

"Yes," he admitted in a broken voice, "it is true! I owe it to him!"

"Then," said the Witch, advancing toward him, her eyes flashing, while the man looked up at her as she held her lantern above his white face, for he still kneeled in the snow, "if you admit that, you admit that what you despised has saved you! What you thought too low and contemptible even for pity has been the instrument chosen to help you in your hour of greatest need! Let that teach you that God is mighty in His use of everything that He has made! God has made everything, — but His world is going on about you; His world of beauty, love,

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feeling, that has not even reached you! You are blind — yet you have never doubted your own vision! Doubt it now, Henry Carruthers! I told you once before, and I say it to you now again: Open your heart! Open your eyes! Look about you!"

And thus, before his own congregation, having lectured the kneeling minister, the old woman turned, adjusted her headdress, and began arranging the rope about her waist. Voices vainly urged her to return to Partlettsville; not to attempt the bitter trip up the hill, alone.

"No!" she replied, indomitably; "as we came, we will go!"

She adjusted the dog's harness, tied little Jim before her, and, as the three turned to face the heavy blast, a broken, timid woman's voice whispered:

"God bless you, Ma'm, — an' your dog!"

Two hours later Henry Carruthers sat alone in his study. The lamp burned low

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and a new-lit fire sparkled in the grate. He sat with his face in his hands, motionless. He seemed to hear a voice repeating: "Beauty — Love — Feeling!" He seemed to see the face of his dead wife, tender and charming. How often he had quenched the smile there! How often his stern precepts had over-ridden and smothered her expressions of love and gentleness! And how had it come about? He had not meant it to be so. Early in his life he had not been so. But rigidity and an unyielding sternness had so grown upon him that he was like a man of iron, and could neither smile nor bend. The hard thing had grown to seem to him, without examination, the right thing; the harsh action, inevitable; the gloomy, dark path, the only true one! And all the while that he had suffered, closing himself into this iron armor, those about him had suffered, too!

Tears fell from his eyes and flowed through his fingers. Love! Beauty! Feeling! How had his married life slipped by, joyless, like dry dust and ashes, with no

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sparkle, no sunshine! And now, to awaken to the wrong of it, after she was gone — too late! He wrung his hands, and that bitter thought — the bitterest in the world: "Life, love, how have you escaped me!" wrung his heart. He bowed his head with a redeeming meekness, a redeeming, self-searching sorrow, and let the tears flow.

They flowed warm, breaking down hardness, encrusted self-esteem and resolute self-repression. And at last, when he raised his head, they still filled his eyes.

Too late! Too late! But no. Those warm tears had already washed away the bitter sorrow of that thought! Thank God, it was not too late! He was still, comparatively, a young man! He still had his children — *her* children — their lives in his keeping.

He rose, drew a deep breath, then walking to the hall door, threw it open, and called his son's name.

The boy, sitting over his untasted supper, waiting this call, started as if an electric

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shock had passed through him. He walked through the hall and stood in the study door. The room before him was associated with nothing but humiliations. He had always entered it with a beating heart and left it with a heavy and bitter one.

But it was a pleasant enough room in itself, especially to-night, with the bright firelight dancing over it. But he saw none of its brightness; he saw only the tall figure before the fire.

Suddenly his father turned, and there was a look so gentle and so deeply softened on his face that the boy, with the quickness of a sensitive child, dropped his eyes. He felt that he had inadvertently surprised that look upon his father's face. That look could not be intended for him!

But it was for him! An arm drew him into the bright circle of the firelight and he heard a voice saying:

"I think we can understand each other better than we have done; at any rate, we are going to try."

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And then his father was holding him closer, and saying:

"My dear boy, I love you dearly — I never knew how dearly until to-night! I want you to try to love and trust me."

And when the boy felt a kind hand pressing his cheek, heard the kind voice in his ear, a thousand memories of his mother, of her gentleness and love, came over him, and with all the impulsiveness of an affectionate, but pent up nature, he threw his arms around his father's neck, and dropping his head upon his shoulder, wept there, for the first time in his life, unashamed, and unafraid.

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CHAPTER XXV

PARTLETTS' AT PEACE

In Partlettsville, during the next few days, a quiet prevailed that was something like awe.

A paper was silently passed around and as silently signed. It was to be sent across the water to the heirs of Partletts', contradicting a former one, and requesting that the present inhabitant of the hill be left there unmolested.

On the following Sunday, when the minister stood in the pulpit, he spoke of a debt of gratitude, undying, to one near at hand. His eyes sought, through the open window, the hill of Partletts', shining green in sweet beauty under the renewing touch of Spring; and those who listened heard, for the first time, a tremor in his clear, steady voice, and saw the glitter of tears in his eyes.

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That night at the Rectory a letter was sealed and directed to a great orphan asylum, at the far end of the state, stating that the child for whom a home there was negotiating, would remain undisturbed where he was.

The child was little Jim, who lay, at this time, inert in the Witch's cottage. That night of adventure and bitter exposure had overtaxed his frail strength. He weakened rapidly, and the Witch sat beside him, watching his difficult breathing.

She sat striving to subdue the fear in her heart that the delicate child was leaving her for no earthly home; striving to console herself with the recollection that his last year, though separated from his old home and his own people, had been a happy one; and with the thought that, if death came to him, he had found it in an effort to save others.

Quiet, therefore, and with what resignation she could summon, the grim old woman sat beside the child in the still, spring afternoon. The lisp of the brook running gently

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at the foot of Partletts', the faint creak of the boughs of trees about Jim's own garden, stirring in the light breeze, came in at the open window; but the only sounds she heard were the child's painful breathing and his half-wandering words. His little, dark face, with its strange expression of half-fright, half-wonder, as if he were already far from her, faring forth alone to some unknown country, kept her heart beating unevenly. Once she rose, — the breathing came so softly she feared that it had ceased. But no, the lips were murmuring, and then a quavering little voice began to chant:

"Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin'!
Ol' Mis' is callin' me!"

It grew weaker, died away, a faint smile closing the lips.

Long the Witch sat, her hands over her face, the great dog at her feet still, beside her. She dared not look at the small, meagre body on the bed lest she should see that a

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very good, loyal little soul was passing away — " over 'cross Jordan — "

The minutes ticked on and on; the dog, drawing himself closer, laid his great head against her skirt, his little eyes raised in sympathy — the brook of Partletts' wandered on to its unceasing tune, the soft breeze stirred, — and then suddenly from the bright western sky the setting sun shot a red gold beam through the window, flooding the room. It passed its glorious touch over the child's closed eyes.

Suddenly Jim moved; he raised himself, and the light from the bright, western sky flooded over his whole face and form. It seemed to him that this splendid light was shining through the glistening leaves and over the yellow fruit of the big orange trees; he smelled the orange flowers, and then, suddenly, his eyes widened, the strange far-away look faded out of them as they rested on the Witch, who had risen to her feet, with John o' Partletts'.

He knew them! He reached forth a small,

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claw-like hand, and a deep, slow voice, with the old, queer little quaver of cheeriness in it, was saying:

"Mis' Beevish — I'se been a-driftin', seems like, — a-driftin' fur! But I dun come home to yo'! Mis' Beevish — Marse Johnny! I dun come home to yo', sure!"

All this happened many years ago, and very peacefully, very beautifully has Partletts' spread its slope toward the sun during the seasons that followed, and very plain, grim, and colorless has stood Partlettsville at its foot. The little stream tinkles past as in days gone by, and the aged willow trees stand whipped, topped, and bent down like old men, — ancient and weary sentinels.

But down the slope, passing under the grim, old trees, and into the town, little Jim has learned to come with a confident heart.

"Little" Jim no longer, however. He is known through the countryside as Jimmy, for though he has grown taller and broader,

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and is, in fact, become quite a self-reliant and sizable person, there is still something droll, something akin to childlikeness about the dark face, — there is indeed such a general readiness about it to show the whites of the eyes and two rows of white teeth in the peculiarly ready and humorous smile of his race that one would scarcely be likely to address him formally as Jim.

As Jimmy, then, he goes. Sometimes as "Jimmy o' Partletts';" sometimes as "Mis' Beevish's Jimmy."

Should you chance to wander into this corner of the world you might meet him almost any day, driving a light spring wagon, painted green, drawn by a sleek horse, and plentifully filled with a supply of neatly arranged, fresh vegetables. Which horse and wagon — presented to him by none other than the Partlettsville folk, when Jim during the years that have slipped by began a modest enterprise of his own in the way of "truck g-yardenin'" — are his pride and joy.

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And such a spot has become that truck garden! The Witch, Jimmy, and the sunny slope of Partletts' forming a famous combination, so that "Partletts' Farm" has become a name almost of wonder; and Jimmy drives his sleek horse, which wears the gayest red tassels bobbing from its harness, and his green wagon, over the whole countryside to the old southern darkey-peddling tune of:

"Sweet corn an' termaters gwine by!
All fresh an' fine, ladies!
Jes' from de vine, ladies!
All fresh an' fine!"

And down in Partlettsville trade is brisk; from the Rectory, where old Elsa oversees the buying with shrewd, just eye, to Kitty Merryweather's, at the end of the high street, where Louisa Myers also steps out of her shop to stand, chatting and bargaining.

"Them's fine cabbage fo' yo', Kitty! Big as my head!" she remarks, selecting and

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turning in her large hands her chosen vegetable.

And Kitty's shrill voice pipes:

"An' them termaters — ripe on both sides, so early! Jus' fine! An' good-lookin' white onions yo' got there, Jimmy! My Willie's favorite dish! Ain't it a crime his not bein' here to enjoy it!"

For Willie, at the age of seventeen, betook him to a life upon the high seas, where, according to his mother, he has become "a fine sailor lad!" He has passed out of our ken, let us therefore hopefully accept such acclaim as impartial truth.

At any rate, a very trim, pretty, and gentle maiden is Maggie, as she stands, slightly shaking her head in disapproval of her mother's too ready acceptance of all things extra in the way of "good measure," which Jimmy is prone to "throw in," just as, in the old days, his Grandmammy did, before him.

Thus, on his rounds, passes Jim; on to Deacon Sawrey's, to Michaelsons', the

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Schaftsmires', and still further until he arrives at Abbottsville, where Mr. Finn, much greyer than formerly, but as kindly and polite, usually "cleans out" what remains in his wagon.

Then home again, along the Abbottsville turnpike, which is just as of yore with its orchards and stone walls, cheerily jingling the money in his pockets, whistling and addressing frequent conversational remarks to the alert, brown ears of his horse, who, in compliment to an old friend, bears the name of Job Junior.

And now, walking along the ridge of Partletts', you might chance at any time to come upon the figure of an old woman, moving about the hill, slightly bent, evidently ageing, but with a vital look about her; and in her hawk-like features something serene, softened, and gentle, which would inevitably draw after her a second, wondering glance. And just as inevitably, somewhere in her vicinity, you will come upon a great beast

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of a dog with earless head and scowling visage and legs stiffening with rheumatism, who, at sight of an intruder, pauses, glancing him over with quick, fierce little eyes, over which the dimness of age is beginning to draw its shadow, and then, lowering his great head, moves laboriously after her whom he follows.

And did you but know it, as you turn, watching him, you are looking after one who has had his share, and no small one, in making part of the history of this little corner of the world — John o' Partletts'!

Down in Partlettsville, should you wish to gratify a nameless curiosity concerning this strange pair and ask about the solitary woman up on the hill, you would be struck by the peculiar tone in which would be given the immediate reply:

"That? — that there is our old woman!"

"And the wild-looking beast?"

"That's her dog, sir. You'll find not a better nor a finer anywhere in the country. Ah, you should have seen him in his day!

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Yes," with that same peculiar something in the tone more marked than ever, " that's our old woman and her dog! "

And then, walking on, without a doubt you would come upon a tall man with clear, well-chiselled features, erect, but with hair very grey at the temples, and fine, dark eyes; and by his side a youth with those same fine, dark eyes, and by the way in which they walk and talk together, and the man rests his hand upon his companion's shoulder, it is to be seen that they are constant, congenial companions.

And yet beyond you will see the Rectory, surrounded by blooming shrubs and bright with flowers, and lingering near the gate a girl with daffodil hair and very, very blue eyes, who, should you be bold enough to praise her garden, will nod, and reply:

" But have you seen the one on the hill? Oh — " unconsciously using the words that another had used years before, " but that *is* a garden! " And her young voice, how extremely sweet! And what a look of sym-

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pathy and gentleness passes over her sensitive mouth and across her bright blue eyes as she lifts her glance to the wood-topped ridge that stands so splendidly gilded in the full, flooding sunshine.

And so, as the years pass, Partletts' and Partlettsville lie there, side by side, no longer divided, but united in spirit. For human courage, human feeling, human daring, have reached down from the hill to the valley; and human sympathy, human understanding, human gratitude have reached up from the valley to the hill-top.

And the old woman up there has entered into a serenity which the great world has never given her, — could never give; but which she has found at last in this little corner of the earth, in the gratitude and understanding of those about her. Perhaps only through some obvious, dramatic occurrence, such as came to her here, could her strange nature have justified itself.

At any rate, she lives at peace with herself, at peace with those about her.

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And Partletts', in its quietness, its wild beauty, raising its fresh crown of nature up to heaven, has redeemed its promise of peace to a striving spirit!

THE END.

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